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# ESL International Students' Perceptions Of Their Academic Readiness For US Higher Education

Jaclyn Combs  
*Hamline University*

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ESL INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ACADEMIC READINESS  
FOR US HIGHER EDUCATION

By Jaclyn Combs

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Arts in English as a Second Language

Hamline University  
Saint Paul, Minnesota  
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Primary Advisor: Betsy Parrish  
Secondary Advisor: Michal Moskow  
Peer Reviewer: Christine Diaz

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

A focus on international education recruitment efforts within higher education in the United States has resulted in an expansion of incoming international students to American colleges and universities (Phakiti, Hirsh. & Woodrow, 2013). Most incoming international students must satisfy the English language admission requirements at their chosen school through acceptable scores in the International English Language Test System (IELTS) or the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) as non-native speakers of English. However, many researchers have questioned if these exam scores adequately reflect a student's English language proficiency to be successful when culturally and academically immersed in American higher education. Indeed, satisfying English language entry requirements does not forego the need for international students to have ongoing English language and academic literacy development in order to complete their studies successfully (Briguglio & Watson, 2014).

### **Impetus for this Inquiry**

During the fall semester of 2009, I had the opportunity to study and live in York, England. Although I did not need to speak a different language while in England, as English is the United Kingdom's official language, I was overcome by both cultural and vernacular differences, as well as differences in societal norms. The experience not only helped me grow as an individual, but also helped to instill in me a global awareness that, before, I had previously lacked. My time abroad also gave me great insight into what other international students and individuals may go through while living in the United States.

After I graduated from my undergraduate coursework, I worked in a variety of positions in higher education until I serendipitously fell into the field of International Education.

Currently, I have found my niche while working as an outgoing Education Abroad Advisor at a liberal arts university since February 2012. This position has helped me uncover my passion and gratification for helping students, from all backgrounds and identities, find opportunities and resources to live and learn in different countries.

Although I mostly work with domestic students wanting to study abroad, my office also oversees international students who attend my institution. After working with a variety of international students for whom English is not a native language, I discovered firsthand the challenges that college level non-native English speakers are faced with when transitioning into American academic culture.

### **IELTS and TOEFL iBT: ESL International Student College Admission**

Most ESL international students enter an American university or college with a passing TOEFL iBT or IELTS score, which is taken to mean they are proficient enough in English for speaking, reading, writing, and listening in an academic setting. The TOEFL iBT online exam scores are based on the student's overall performance on the questions in each section of the test. For the Reading and Listening portions, students must answer at least one question in each section, write at least one essay for the Writing section, and complete at least one Speaking task to receive an official score. Each of the four sections is scaled from 0-30 and the total score can be from 0-120. Human raters and automated scoring methods are used to generate an authentic picture of the language proficiency level of the test taker (TOEFL – International English, 2017). The IELTS Academic exam results are reported using a 0-9 band scale for each of the four exam sections: Reading, Listening, Writing, and Speaking. The Overall Band Score is the average of

the four component scores and the scores are rounded to the nearest whole or half band (IELTS – International English, 2017). At my institution, undergraduate ESL international students must receive a minimum of 79 on the TOEFL iBT and a 6.5 on the IELTS to demonstrate that their English proficiency is at a high enough level in order to be admitted by the university. Graduate ESL international students must receive a minimum of 80 on the TOEFL iBT and a 6.5 on the IELTS (Hamline University Website, 2017).

Can these English Language Proficiency test scores truly demonstrate academic preparedness for the demands of a fully immersed English language post-secondary education? To what degree do they demonstrate readiness for new classroom expectations and practices? In my professional role, I have found that there is a gap between the current English language preparation of ESL international students and what is expected of them within the realities of English language higher education instruction. Faculty frequently report that ESL international students struggle with classroom participation, synthesizing information from multiple sources, citations, plagiarism, and have no experiences with researching. My perception is that ESL international students may have different ways of constructing knowledge based on their home culture and academic experiences. Many times, they have never been expected to exhibit the kinds of classroom skills that a U.S. higher education classroom demands for success.

Indeed, recent research (Chang, 2011; Kokhan, 2012) shows that ESL international students are faced with a variety of new demands and challenges when immersing themselves in an American university or college. Some studies state that more and more American universities require incoming internationals to participate in intensive English language preparatory programs to ensure a positive transition into post-secondary education in the United States. Other researchers have found that ESL international students also grapple with engaging with new

teaching environments, different student-teacher relationship expectations, academic as well as social adaptability, language barriers, and academic confidence. These also suggest what higher education institutions need to do in order to better support ESL international students, and further literature will be presented in chapter two of this study.

### **Identified Gaps in Academic Readiness Among International Students**

Several researchers have demonstrated that an acceptable admission test score is not necessarily an adequate predictor of academic success in the US higher education setting. Indeed, Dehghanpisheh (1987) and Chang's (2011) research focuses on the variety and diversity of English language preparatory programs and curricula that universities have developed due to the need that ESL international students have to be fully prepared for academic study at the higher education level. Additionally, Kokhan's (2012) study found that ESL preparatory curriculum is needed due to the lag in time from when students take their English language entry exams and when they complete the admissions process with their chosen university

These studies have not looked at students' own perceptions about how prepared they feel they are for the demands of higher education in the US. Finding this out first hand from students will help American higher education faculty and staff better support the language and academic needs of international students. With this support, these students can be both academically and culturally successful at an American university, which will ultimately help them stay at the university and earn their degree(s). Therefore, the purpose with this research is to investigate whether there are gaps between ESL international students' current academic preparation and what is expected of them in US American higher education classrooms. I would like to know what international students' perceptions are of their level of academic preparation from their

home country and what is expected of them in a higher education setting the in US. I will explore the following research questions:

- What are ESL international students' perceptions about their level of academic readiness for the expectations in American higher education settings?
- What are the academic challenges that ESL international students face in the context of an American higher education?
- How do international ESL students believe that American educators can better support them both culturally and academically?

### **Role of Researcher**

My current position as an Education Abroad Advisor allowed me to identify eight ESL international students to partake in a quantitative survey. The survey was used to find evidence of the exact gaps in learning that students are facing. After students took the survey, I chose two of them to take part in a qualitative interview to get more information about the learning gaps. In my role as researcher, I would like to use the information gained from this research to reevaluate and realign the current support methods used at my institution. This reevaluation would be used to enlighten university faculty and staff about the needs of ESL international students in order to best support them at my university.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I introduced my research interests, explored the increase of international students coming to American higher education institutions, and the definition of what it means to be an ESL international student. My role as an Education Abroad Advisor first interested me in the conversation of how current American higher education institutions support ESL international students and led me to my current research. The purpose of this study is to

investigate any gaps that may exist between ESL student readiness/expectations and the realities of US higher education demands.

### **Chapter Overviews**

Chapter Two, Literature Review, reviews the current literature, focusing on English language proficiency, cultural competences, and academic success of ESL international students. Next, Chapter Three, Methods, outlines and details the quantitative and qualitative data collection methods as well as the investigation of the research findings in the study. Chapter Four will present the findings of my research analysis. Conclusions and reflections drawn from this research, limitations of the study, as well as future recommendations will be discussed in Chapter Five.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Review**

The stories of my professional experience with ESL international students presented in the previous chapter demonstrate that even though incoming international students have a high proficiency in English based on their entrance exams, they often still face challenges integrating into an American higher education setting. These observations led me to investigate international students' perceptions of their English language academic readiness for post-secondary education in the United States. This study explores the academic challenges that ESL international students face in the context of American higher education. I'm also interested in how American educators can better support ESL international students academically.

In this chapter, I will investigate scholarly research on this topic, focusing on the following subcategories of inquiry:

- Characteristics of English as a foreign language instruction outside of the United States
- Current support that US-based institutions are unitizing for international students
- Challenges for ESL international students pursuing Western-style postsecondary education
- Support initiatives from US higher education faculty and programs for ESL international students in their classrooms

## **English as a Foreign Language Instruction**

To better understand ESL international students, it is critical to understand home educational systems and academic cultures. In most circumstances, the teaching environment and student-teacher relationship expectations are very different in many cultures from a Western US American setting (Chowdhury, 2003). Often, US-based English as a second language (ESL) classroom culture is at odds with the academic culture of the home country; this difference in teaching methods and values of English language instructors shape the diversity of learning experiences for non-native English speaking students (Chowdhury, 2003). According to Hu (2005), many cultures abroad have a learning culture where “education is conceived more as a process of knowledge accumulation than as a process of using knowledge for immediate purposes, and the preferred model of teaching is a mimetic or epistemic one that emphasizes knowledge transmission” (p. 653). These ways of learning, teaching, and constructing knowledge in many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings are in direct conflict with what is expected of learners once they are in a US American college classroom. Often ESL international students expect teachers to be authority figures where their teaching methods are teacher-centered (Chowdhury, 2003).

Additionally, Rahman & Alhaisoni (2013) pointed out that teacher-centered rather than learner-centered teaching methods are a greater hindrance for students, especially if the teachers aren't well qualified and properly trained. Rahman & Alhaisoni observed that in other countries where English isn't the native language, potential teachers have been selected for teaching English language program[s] with “no professional training, no classroom experience, and little or no knowledge of the subject” (p. 116). A lack of well-trained instructors could significantly demotivate students if their needs and wants with language acquisition aren't being met. In



addition to differing educational models in other countries, international students can experience an array of program models once in the United States, which is the focus of the next section.

### **US-based English as a Second Language Preparatory Programs**

An important notion found in recent writings is the idea of universities providing English language preparatory opportunities in-country for ESL international students (Dehghanpisheh, 1987). A majority of ESL instructors and administrators argue that even if an incoming ESL international student has a fairly high TOEFL score, it does not automatically guarantee the academic success of the student at a mainstreamed university level. According to Dehghanpisheh, “the goal of the ESL program in higher education is to produce students whose listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in English allow them to succeed in their university classes...[and] to compete on an equal basis with American students” (577). Dehghanpisheh’s research highlighted common undergraduate ESL program models used at institutions around the United States in order to categorize program types as well as to create a framework for assessment and improvement for these programs. One common model of ESL programming is the *Conservative model*, which maintains a program structure similar to what has been designed for native English speaking students. Under this model, ESL international students who did not attain the necessary TOEFL score took an intensive English writing class for non-admitted students. International students with high TOEFL scores took a for-credit first year English class that resembled a standard first-year English course for native English speakers.

Next, the *Traditional model* uses three tracks for ESL international students depending on their TOEFL scores for admissions (Dehghanpisheh, 1987): A full-time intensive English language course for non-admitted students, a pre-freshman English course for conditionally

admitted students or students with low TOEFL scores, and a for-credit English course for admitted students with higher TOEFL scores.

The *Bridging model* provides more transitional opportunities between the intensive English programs to help ESL international students get the required TOEFL score needed to enter university, to participate in semi-intensive English coursework alongside a reduced academic load, or to start out mainstreamed into mainstream coursework. Lastly, the *Progressive model* does not deny admission to ESL international students if they do not meet the TOEFL score requirement. Instead, this model also factors in students' previous academic coursework when admitting them to university and placing students into ESL intensive programs.

Chang (2011) also insisted on the usefulness of intensive English programs before the start of the academic coursework. In her research, Chang analyzed The American English and Culture Program (AECPP), an intensive ESL program based at Arizona State University, which ESL international students take before they start their mainstreamed university coursework. This program runs five specific eight-week programs that focus not only on the combined skills of reading/writing, listening/speaking, but also has courses that integrate American cultural experience in with the course. Chang asserted that the intensive English programs that combine English language proficiencies and cultural immersion provide the best opportunity for ESL international students to become "fully prepared for academic study at the university level, while building on their experiences of American as well as global community, communication, connection, and corporation" (p. 24). Dehghanpisheh (1987) and Chang's (2011) research provide in-depth history and overviews of the variety and diversity found within ESL preparatory curriculum. Indeed, their data show that many higher education institutions try to work with ESL international students during the admissions process and before the start of the

term to ensure that the students will achieve a passing exam score to be admitted into school as well as engagement with the cultural expectation in their academic level.

Furthermore, Kokhan's (2012) study on ESL preparatory curriculum found that the need for ESL preparatory curriculum is due to a lapse in time between when students take their English language entry exams and when they apply to their chosen institutions. During this time lapse, students do not refresh their English language knowledge and gradually lose their proficiency strengths, which is one reason why their standardized language proficiency tests do not accurately predict ESL placement. Kokhan recommended that educators should not have assumptions about the "English proficiency of international students based on their standardized language proficiency test scores...if the scores are a year old or older" (306). This research gives insight into what educational institutions in the United States should consider when placing ESL international students into college level coursework. In order to help students be successful, higher education institutions should create parameters on the length of time between their standardized language proficiency test scores and the start of university coursework.

In their article, Briguglio & Watson (2014) argued that an embedded language development approach across all university curricula was needed to best support ESL international students. An embedded English language approach provides a variety of alternatives for student language progress, which range from student self-access options in preparatory coursework to language support that is completely immersed in the mainstream curricula. Briguglio & Watson maintained that the embedded English language development approach must be a feature of any modern university if it wishes to create more student diversity and campus internationalization. However, Briguglio & Watson did state that this approach relies heavily on staff development, "which needs to equip academic teaching staff with the sorts of

knowledge, awareness and skills” (72) needed to effectively teach. This means that ESL international students would have integrated language and cultural support across all academic departments and faculty and tutoring staff would need to be trained and developed in how to provide this student language support and development.

As seen in this literature, the background and variety of English as a Second language preparatory curriculum are extensive. Higher education institutions want ESL international students to both study at their institutions and be successful. Therefore, institutions have designed a spectrum of cultural and language development coursework to help get students through the admissions door. However, in focusing on English language development at the beginning of university immersion, there tends to be no follow through during the rest of their academic career. This lack of language support could have a negative impact on ESL international students. Briguglio & Watson’s (2014) embedded English language supports are on the right track to best support and retain ESL international students. My aim is that the data collected from this study will help define the academic gaps students continue to face after their preparatory English language coursework.

### **Challenges for International Student Success in the US**

**Personal factors impacting student success.** Scholars have also been reviewing the impact that personal factors have on English language learning for ESL international students. In their study, Phakiti, Hirsh & Woodrow (2013) argued that “the status of international students needs to be well understood because it involves multiple layers of political, economic, cultural, social and personal complexities” (p. 251). Their research involved collecting data from 341 ESL international students and considered the influences that personal factors had on students’ English language and academic performance. Phakiti, Hirsh & Woodrow found that the

significant personal factors that impact ESL international students are self-regulation, which was defined as the degree that students are actively motivated in their learning process; and self-efficacy, or the student's impression of their ability to accomplish a specific academic undertaking; and motivation, which was defined as the internal ability to advance and become accomplished in what they do. Per their results, Phakiti, Hirsh & Woodrow argued that host universities must communicate to ESL international students how significant their personal values can impact their English language proficiency and academic performance.

In their study, Telbis, Helgeson, and Kingsbury (2014) researched how academic success was connected to international students' confidence. The authors' results found that the most impacting personal factors for ESL international students and their confidence were how they adapted to social adaptability, language barriers, academic ability, and financial need. To raise students' confidence and academic success, they found that host universities must provide and maintain social events to integrate ESL international students into the community. Telbis et al. saw that social events helped with ESL international students' social adaptability, language barrier, and academic ability by feeling connected to the community and having more support.

Additionally, in their study Sato & Hodge (2015) analyzed the academic and social experiences of visiting exchange students from Japan. They found that the ESL Japanese exchange students greatly struggled with personal experiences of social distance from local students, collectivism versus individualism cultural norms, isolation in group discussion, and negativity in the classroom from professors. These personal experiences created an environment where the visiting international students felt segregated and alone, which intensified their academic and social difficulties.

Financial need was another significant personal factor for ESL international students. Telbis et al. (2014) asserted that host universities should be up front about the educational costs that international students would face and should help students find on-campus employment. If students aren't able to afford the cost of their education in the United States, the stress could impact their academic success and immersion into the classroom practices in the US.

**Classroom practices in the US.** Another theme found in recent writings about the academic success of ESL international students is the need for instructor accountability for ESL support when designing their course content. In a study on cultural competence and its impact on international students, Nieto & Booth (2010) revealed that conflicts can occur when students and teachers come from different cultural backgrounds. The conflicts can be related to contrasts in classroom engagement expectations and teaching styles, as well as second language environments. Nieto & Booth's research reasoned that university instructors' "cultural competence is an essential part of making international students feel welcomed and comfortable while studying in the United States" (p. 421). When instructors are aware of how their instruction can be positively influenced by a culturally diverse university they become not only better instructors but also promoters of intercultural understanding and development. Nieto & Booth state that this understanding is important because students should not feel rejected or humiliated for their cultural background.

In a similar study, Tange & Jensen (2012) also surveyed how university faculty recognize and establish the cultural differences in their classrooms with students for other cultural and educational traditions. Their study maintained that ESL international students and educators all have different educational expectations and experiences and that it is the responsibility of educators to look past their home culture's idea of "good" instructors and "deviant" learners

when instructing ESL international students. In order to help educators better instruct ESL international students, Tange & Jensen argued for the “development and implementation of a new pedagogy to be carried out at the university level, thereby establishing a link between [educators’] everyday practice and an institutional commitment to internationalization” (p. 191).

Johnson and Parrish (2010) surveyed Adult Basic Education (ABE) transitions-level instructors as well as university level faculty to identify instruction and assessment practices. Johnson and Parrish’s study goals were to “identify where [Adult Basic Education] transitions instruction practices were aligning or not aligning with college and university faculty and [to] identify the professional development needs for transitions level teachers as indicated by any gaps in alignment” (619). By surveying Adult Basic Education instructors and university faculty, Johnson & Parrish were able to examine the gaps and alignments that were happening in between ABE classrooms practices and post-secondary education demands. Based on the results of their original research, Johnson & Parrish (2010) have designed and implemented professional development initiatives to advance the teaching methods of ABE instructors so that they can better prepare students for the academic rigor and standards of post-secondary education. Although this study does not focus specifically on ESL international students, the premise can be applied to adult international education at American universities because it focuses on the issue of integrating academic readiness skills into adult ESL instruction.

Another critical element of accountability in the curriculum design process is needs assessment. Huang’s (2010) research analyzed self-assessment perspectives from ESL undergraduate and graduate students on their English language skills as well as instructors’ assessment of their students’ skills. Instructors must not only collect students’ self-assessment, but then use the diagnostic to guide their learners to expand on their English language skills.

Huang (2010) asserted that when university faculty design their curriculum, they must put learners at the center of the learning experience. By continuously inquiring about and reviewing their learners' needs assessments, Huang (2010) claimed that faculty can prioritize what they teach so that they begin their instruction at the students' level.

### **Cultural Readjustment of Traditional University Structures**

Recent literature has highlighted the need for traditional university structures to readjust so that ESL international students can better adapt to their new higher education setting. According to Rubenstein (2006), ESL college educators and institutions must familiarize themselves with the various educational models, instructional practices, and learning outcome goals from around the world to review their internal university structures. Rubenstein (2006) argued that "recognizing societal culture and cross-cultural similarities and differences becomes more, not less important" (p.440) for universities when working with ESL international students.

In their article, Kelly & Moogan (2012) found that the increased numbers of international students at higher education institutions are changing the needs and demographic of the classroom. Based on their findings, Kelly & Moogan (2012) reasoned institutions must "shift from being mono-cultural to multicultural, if internal cohesion is to be maintained" (p. 39). They recommended that this "global pedagogy" be achieved by adapting current resources on campus to meet the needs of ESL international students. This "global pedagogy" would help university staff and faculty become more familiar with the needs of students and would better support student and staff welfare.

In a study on reciprocal cultural understanding and intercultural communication, Coles & Swami (2012) established that ESL international students' adjustment to their university structures significantly diminished as their first year of university progressed. Their study



showed that the current university structures only focused on providing cultural and academic adjustment for ESL international students at the beginning of the year. This adjustment focus diminished as the semesters went on due to assignment pressure and students adapting and establishing friendships. Furthermore, Volet & Tan-Quigley (1999) stressed the importance of understanding cross-cultural communication between ESL international students and higher education faculty, staff, and administration. Volet & Tan-Quigley (1999) called for the need of acknowledging misunderstandings in intercultural communication so that there can be a “development of reciprocal understanding of each others’ cultures by all involved – academic, administrative and general staff, as well as local and guest students” (114). Volet & Tan-Quigley (1999) believed that this development in understanding of everyday social encounters and communications will further the internationalizing of curriculum and design of higher education.

### **Gap in the Research**

While research has indicated what American universities need to do in order to better support ESL students, there is little focus on the student perspective of what their gaps are in their academic learning at an English-speaking American college. The present study uses a mixed methods approach to collect data from ESL international students on how prepared they felt they were for American academic culture and classroom expectations. A goal of this inquiry is to help American university faculty and staff better support international students. The research questions are the following:

- What are ESL international students’ perceptions about their level of academic readiness for the expectations in American higher education settings?

- What are the academic challenges that ESL international students face in the context of an American higher education?
- How do international ESL students believe that American educators can better support them both culturally and academically?

### **Summary**

This chapter examined the common themes found within recent literature of English language proficiency, cultural competences, and the academic success of English as Second Language (ESL) international students. Recent research shows that American universities need to develop intensive English language preparatory programs for incoming international students in order to best prepare them for entering into post-secondary education in the United States. Research also reveals that ESL international students also cope with new classroom environments, different student-teacher relationship expectations, academic, as well as social adaptability, language barriers, and academic confidence. In the next chapter, I explain the methodology I used to identify the gaps that international university students found within their academic learning in the United States.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Methods**

The purpose of this research is to investigate international students' perceptions of how prepared they were for American academic learning expectations and cultural norms. My specific research questions are:

- What are ESL international students' perceptions about their level of academic readiness for the expectations in American higher education settings?
- What are the academic challenges that ESL international students face in the context of an American higher education?
- How do international ESL students believe that American educators can better support them both culturally and academically?

This chapter presents the methods used in the study to gather data for the research questions. It focuses on the research paradigm and rationale, data collection tools, procedure, and analysis used for the quantitative and qualitative methodology used in this study.

#### **Research Paradigm and Methodology: Description and Rationale**

This study used a mix-methods approach combining both quantitative and qualitative data (Mackey & Gass, 2016). This approach was intentionally selected to show the diversity of experiences collected from both methods. The quantitative data in this study were gathered using a survey and were used to determine ESL international students' self-disclosed perceptions

about how prepared they were for their English language experience and the academic culture of a small, liberal arts university in the Midwest. The qualitative data was gathered from interviews. After the collection of the quantitative data, two students were asked to participate in interviews that asked more in-depth questions. The interview method was selected because it was an interactive way to engage students to elicit additional data from students' initial survey responses (Mackey & Gass, 2016). The results of this research will be used to make recommendations on how American higher education educators can better support ESL international students to be both academically and culturally successful at an American university.

### **Participants**

The participants for this study were eight adult visiting and degree seeking ESL international students from around the world who were studying at a small, private, Midwest liberal arts university for a semester or full academic year. Visiting and degree-seeking students were recruited to participate in the survey, if interested, and these students were either at an undergraduate level or graduate level in their coursework. The qualification to take the survey was to have English as a second language. I also collected other detailed information as displayed in Table 1 below.

*Table 1*

Participant Academic Information Question.

<b>Participant Name:</b>	<b>Academic Level (Undergraduate /Graduate):</b>	<b>Area of Study:</b>	<b>Home Country &amp; Native Language:</b>	<b>How long have you been studying at this University?:</b>
Larissa	Undergraduate	Economics and Finance	Rwanda and Kinyarwanda	Three years
Rosaline	Graduate	English Language and Literature	Argentina and Spanish	One year
Laura	Graduate	Master's in Business Administration	Indonesia and Indonesian	One year
Lavender	Undergraduate	International Business and Chinese	Vietnam and Vietnamese	Four years
Heather	Graduate	International Business	Brazil and Portuguese	Two years
Daphne	Graduate	Education	China and Chinese	One year
Ryan	Undergraduate	Psychology	China and Cantonese	Three years
Liv	Undergraduate	Psychology	Germany and German	One year

After the students took the survey, I selected two students to complete a qualitative interview, if interested, to get more information about their self-disclosed learning gaps and alignments. The two students who were selected to be interviewed for this study were chosen because their academic experiences and home countries represented the diversity within student experiences. The first interviewee, Larissa, was an undergraduate from Rwanda and the second interviewee, Rosaline, was a graduate student from Argentina. The qualification to participate in the interviews was that they needed to qualify for and participate in the quantitative survey.

## **Procedure**

This study used a mixed methods approach to collect data from ESL international students on how prepared they felt they were for American academic culture and classroom expectations. The survey was used to find evidence of any gaps or areas of alignment between what learners were prepared for academically and what they face in the US academic setting. After all participants took the survey, I selected two to complete a qualitative interview to gain more information about their self-disclosed learning gaps and alignments. In a mixed-methods study, using a qualitative approach after a quantitative survey is considered a desirable next step because it helps to verify the conclusions of the quantitative data and enrich and elaborate on the analysis (Mackey & Gass, 2016). In my role as researcher, I would like to use the information gained from this research to reevaluate and realign the current support methods used at my institution. This reevaluation will be used to notify university faculty and staff about the needs of ESL international students to best support them at their university. The information will also be available to other universities.

### **Data Collection Technique 1: Survey**

In order to elicit international students' self-disclosed gaps between what is expected in a university-level courses and their prior English language preparation, and the types and frequency of academic skills that they are expected to use in their university-level classrooms, this study used a survey (see Appendix A). The survey, adapted from Johnson and Parrish (2010), was conducted online using Survey Monkey and focused on students' academic experiences while at an American university. The survey questions were designed to determine learner perceptions about (a) the basic academic skills expected in university level coursework; (b) common modes of instruction used in their classes; (c) common English language skills

expected in a university setting; and (d) their level of college readiness. The survey included sections on academic reading, writing, listening, speaking, as well as the amount of time students spent on weekly assignments and what they wished they had known before entering university level coursework.

Each survey question attempted to collect examples of the types of academic English ESL international students use in their daily coursework and rated the academic skills by importance or frequency. Figure 1 and Figure 2 illustrate sample questions from the basic academic skill section of the survey portion of data collection.

**What type of texts or reading materials do you read in your classes? Click all that apply.**

- ☐ Textbooks
- ☐ Journal articles
- ☐ Magazine or newspaper articles
- ☐ Works of fiction
- ☐ Memoirs or biographies
- ☐ Technical drawings, graphs, or charts
- ☐ Other:

*Figure 1. Sample 1 Academic Reading Survey Question.*

**For each skill, please use the following scale to indicate to what degree you use the following skills in your English language university courses:**

- a. Understanding and following written instructions: Rarely, Sometimes, Always
- b. Reading efficiently: Rarely, Sometimes, Always
- c. Understanding and analyzing data from graphs, charts, and diagrams: Rarely, Sometimes, Always
- d. Distinguishing main ideas from secondary ideas: Rarely, Sometimes, Always
- e. Distinguishing fact from opinion: Rarely, Sometimes, Always
- f. Taking notes on information read/heard: Rarely, Sometimes, Always
- g. Identifying and organizing new, field-specific vocabulary: Rarely, Sometimes, Always
- h. Evaluating the value of information read: Rarely, Sometimes, Always
- i. Synthesizing information from multiple texts: Rarely, Sometimes, Always
- j. Using the contents and index pages to find information: Rarely, Sometimes, Always
- k. Using a dictionary, thesaurus, or other reference book: Rarely, Sometimes, Always
- l. Accurately reading measurements on technical or laboratory equipment: Rarely, Sometimes, Always
- m. Comments \_\_\_\_\_

*Figure 2. Sample 2 Academic Reading Survey Question.*

## **Data Collection Technique 2: Interviews**

This study also used follow-up open-ended interviews as another means for collecting data. The interview questions were based on the student's survey answers and dug deeper into the self-disclosed learning gaps that students reported in the survey. The qualification to participate in the interviews was that they needed to qualify for and participate in the quantitative survey. The two students who were selected to be interviewed for this study were chosen because their academic experiences and home countries represented the diversity within student experiences. The first interviewee, Larissa, was an undergraduate from Rwanda and the second interviewee, Rosaline, was a graduate student from Argentina. They were interviewed after they submitted their survey results. The interview took place in a neutral space on the university's campus. After student approval, all interviews were recorded and reviewed for further analysis



after collection. These students were selected for the interview data collection because they represent diverse student populations and experiences at my university. Interview questions were based on results of the survey. Some example questions are:

- It seems that you were pretty prepared for academic listening skills before coming to university and you stated that all listening skills were very important. Why do you think listening skills are so very important for the success of ESL international students?
- You stated that the incoming international students need to be aware of the homework and assignment load in a US university environment in order to be successful. How can this university do a better job making these expectations more transparent to incoming international students?
- You stated that you were very well prepared for the various kinds of faculty instruction and instructional methods before you came to this university but that these types of instructional methods were used less frequently in your home country. How did you become more confident with these methods and what were the common types of instructional methods used in your home country? If you did feel prepared, but the methodology was very different in your home country (no group work, no student-led activities), what is it that prepared you for that?

The full set of questions for each participant can be found in Appendix B.

### **Survey Analysis**

The data collected from the survey was collated, compiled, and analyzed using Survey Monkey. The compiled data was used to review the entire group experiences and gaps in alignment between their preparation level and university-level course expectations. The analysis also looked at each individual student to gain a perspective on the spectrum of English language

gaps and experiences of the group. The analysis of the individuals helped me select interview candidates. Students who were selected for the interview process were based on extremes – either they had strong gaps or aligned with the English language expectations to show a spectrum of experiences. They were also representative of the types of students we serve at my institute: one undergraduate and one graduate, and from two different parts of the world. The interviews were recorded and were further analyzed for themes that emerged.

### **Interview Analysis**

The interviews served to elucidate factors affecting the survey responses and allowed for a more nuanced analysis of participant data. I looked for and recorded emergent themes from the open-ended interview questions regarding, for example, their prior educational experiences in their home countries as well as any mismatches between those experiences and the expectations in classrooms in the US. I provide vignettes from the interviews in Chapter Four to illustrate any gaps or alignments between participants' perceptions about their levels of academic readiness and where they could have been better prepared for success within a US classroom.

### **Verification of Data and Ethics**

The participants all took part in a quantitative survey and two participants took part in additional individual interviews. Confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms for all participants. All research was stored in a secure password protected personal computer and not on my work computer, where the study was being conducted, and could only be reviewed by the researcher. To protect against any unforeseen risks, students were guaranteed anonymity and always had the right to withdraw at any time or point within my data collection/research process. Students are able to receive a summary of the research results, if they would like. The potential risk in this study was relatively low because all the participants were adult non-native English

speakers and the information being solicited was not of a highly sensitive or embarrassing nature. The only cost to the participants was that of the time it took them to be interviewed. Informed consent was obtained through an electronically signed and dated Google form (see Appendix C). For further protection of students' identities, questionnaire and interview recordings will be destroyed one year after the completion of this study. Although I work at and have knowledge of the university where this research was conducted, I have no connection to or control over the participants' academic coursework.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the research methodology used for this study. An overview of the research rational, data collection, procedure, and analysis were detailed. The next chapter will present the results of this research.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Results**

The previous chapter highlighted the methodology of this study and outlined the data collection techniques that were used. This chapter will present the results of the data collection process. The data collected serves to answer the three guiding questions for this research:

- What are ESL international students' perceptions about their level of academic readiness for the expectations in American higher education settings?
- What are the academic challenges that ESL international students face in the context of an American higher education?
- How do international ESL students believe that American educators can better support them both culturally and academically?

### **Data Collection Process**

In order to help answer the research questions, a quantitative survey (see Appendix A) was conducted with visiting and degree-seeking ESL international students in order to elicit international students' self-disclosed gaps between what is expected in university-level courses and their prior English language preparation, and the types and frequency of academic skills that they are expected to use in their university-level classrooms. This survey, adapted from Johnson and Parrish (2010), was conducted using Survey Monkey and focused on academic experiences while at an American university. The survey questions were designed to determine learner perceptions about (a) the basic academic skills expected in university level coursework; (b) common modes of instruction used in their classes; (c) common English language skills expected

in a university setting; and (d) their level of college readiness. The survey included sections on academic reading, writing, listening, speaking, as well as the amount of time students spent on weekly assignments and what they wished they had known before entering university level coursework in the United States.

Additionally, a series of qualitative open-ended interviews were conducted with two ESL international students after they submitted their survey results. These interviews were held in person in a confidential area on my university campus during the month of June 2017. The two students who were selected for the interview process were based on extremes – either they had strong gaps or aligned with the English language expectations to show a range of experiences. They were also representative of the types of students we serve at my institute: one undergraduate and one graduate, and from two different parts of the world. The interviews were recorded and were further analyzed for themes that emerge. The interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and dug deeper into their answers to the survey topics related to their English language experiences. The two participants in the interviews were: Rosaline, a graduate student from Argentina who has been studying English Language and Literature and Larissa, an undergraduate student from Rwanda who has been studying Economics and Finance. The interviews were semi-structured, using a series of questions as a guide. The purpose was not to have a rigid, formal interview, but to engage in a dialog with the participant and to have open-ended questions. This method was utilized because it is believed that the answers given in a dialog help the student feel more comfortable so that they can better self-report their perceptions or attitudes (Mackey & Gass, 2016).

## **Student Survey Results**

The 44 questions in the survey were categorized into the following groups: Student Background, Method of Classroom and Faculty Instruction, Reading Skills, Writing Skills, Listening Skills, Speaking Skills, Assessment Practices, and Academic Culture. Based on the survey results, I have chosen to share the most pertinent questions and responses that are related to the research topic for each skill area. Samples are presented for each skill area and a brief analysis about what the results show are discussed. Although there was a total of eight survey respondents, there were six students who consistently answered the survey questions and two students who consistently elected to skip answering questions.

**Reading skills results.** The first skill section of the survey focused on reading skills. Figure 3, below, shows the survey results on how students responded to how frequently they use specific reading skills in their English language university coursework.

**For each skill, please use the following scale to indicate to what degree you use the following skills in your English language university courses:**

	Rarely	Sometimes	Always	Total	Weighted Average
Understanding and following written instructions	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	83.33% 5	6	2.83
Reading efficiently	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	66.67% 4	6	2.67
Understanding and analyzing data from graphs, charts, and diagrams	16.67% 1	50.00% 3	33.33% 2	6	2.17
Distinguishing main ideas from secondary ideas	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	66.67% 4	6	2.67
Distinguishing fact from opinion	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	66.67% 4	6	2.33
Taking notes on information read/heard	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	50.00% 3	6	2.33
Identifying and organizing new, field-specific	0.00% 0	83.33% 5	16.67% 1	6	2.17
Evaluating the value of information read	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	50.00% 3	6	2.33
Synthesizing information from multiple texts	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	50.00% 3	6	2.33
Using the contents and index pages to find information	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	6	2.00
Using a dictionary, thesaurus, or other reference book	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	50.00% 3	6	2.33
Accurately reading measurements on technical or laboratory equipment	50.00% 3	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	6	1.67

*Figure 3. Survey Reading Question 15 Response.*

It is important to note that five out of the six respondents (83.33%) stated that they always use the reading skills of understanding and following written instructions. Additionally, most students also responded that they always use reading efficiently (66.67%), distinguishing main ideas from secondary ideas (66.67%), and distinguishing fact from opinion (66.67%). Half of the participants chose “always” for taking notes on information read/heard (50.00%), evaluation of the value of information read (50.00%), synthesizing information from multiple texts (50.00%), and using a dictionary, thesaurus, or other reference book (50.00%) skills while in their English language university courses.

When asked to determine how important these same skills were for their success in their university coursework (see Figure 4) 50.00% of the student respondents stated that

understanding and following written instructions as well as reading were efficiently extremely important to their success at university.

**For each skill, please use the following scale to indicate how important it is to your success at university:**

	Not applicable to my field	Not very important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important	Extremely important	Total	Weighted Average
Understanding and following written instructions	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	50.00% 3	6	5.33
Reading efficiently - comprehension and appropriate speed	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	50.00% 3	6	5.00
Understanding and analyzing data from graphs, charts, and diagrams	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	50.00% 3	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	6	3.67
Distinguishing main ideas from secondary ideas	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	6	4.50
Distinguishing fact from opinion	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	66.67% 4	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	6	4.33
Taking notes on information read/heard	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	66.67% 4	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6	3.50
Identifying and organizing new, field-specific vocabulary	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	50.00% 3	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6	3.33
Evaluating the value of information read	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	50.00% 3	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	6	4.33
Synthesizing information from multiple texts	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	6	4.00
Using the contents and index pages to find information	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	50.00% 3	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6	2.67
Using a dictionary, thesaurus, or other reference book	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	6	3.67
Accurately reading measurements on technical or laboratory equipment	50.00% 3	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	6	2.33

*Figure 4. Survey Reading Question 16 Response.*

Students also stated that skills that were important to them were distinguishing fact from opinion, taking notes on information read/heard, identifying, and organizing new, field specific vocabulary, as well as evaluating the value of information read.

Students were then asked to identify how prepared they felt for these kinds of reading skills before they came to university (see Figure 5).



**How prepared were you for these kinds of reading skills before you came to this University:**

	Not applicable to my field	Not very prepared	Somewhat prepared	Prepared	Very prepared	Extremely prepared	Total	Weighted Average
Understanding and following written instructions	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	50.00% 3	16.67% 1	6	4.67
Reading efficiently - comprehension and appropriate speed	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	6	3.17
Understanding and analyzing data from graphs, charts, and diagrams	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	50.00% 3	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6	3.00
Distinguishing main ideas from secondary ideas	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	50.00% 3	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	6	3.67
Distinguishing fact from opinion	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	6	3.83
Taking notes on information read/heard	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	50.00% 3	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	6	3.83
Identifying and organizing new, field-specific vocabulary	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	50.00% 3	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	6	3.67
Evaluating the value of information read	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	66.67% 4	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	6	3.50
Use and combine information from multiple sources (books, lectures, videos, articles)	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	6	3.83
Using the contents and index pages to find information	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	6	3.67
Using a dictionary, thesaurus, or other reference book	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	6	4.83
Accurately reading measurements on technical or laboratory equipment	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6	2.67

*Figure 5. Survey Reading Question 17 Response.*

Three out of the six (50.00 %) responded that they were very prepared for understanding and following written instructions. However, it is important to note that most students identified as feeling only somewhat prepared for reading efficiently and evaluating the value of information read. This is notable because students reported earlier in the survey that proficiency in both reading skills were not only important to their success at university but that they also always have to utilize these skills in their classes. Additionally, most students did not report that they were very extremely prepared for these reading skills before coming to university.

**Writing skills results.** For the writing section, question 22 in the survey asked students to cite how frequently they use certain writing skills in their college courses (see Figure 6).

### How often do your professors have you:

	Rarely	Sometimes	Always	Total	Weighted Average
Plan and outlining drafts	33.33% 2	50.00% 3	16.67% 1	6	1.83
Writing drafts	16.67% 1	50.00% 3	33.33% 2	6	2.17
Revising drafts	50.00% 3	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	6	1.83
Combine information from outside sources	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	66.67% 4	6	2.67
Evaluating resources	16.67% 1	50.00% 3	33.33% 2	6	2.17
Using quotations and citing sources appropriately in the text, in footnotes and/or a bibliography	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	100.00% 6	6	3.00
Grammatical accuracy in written work	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	100.00% 6	6	3.00
Using correct punctuation	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	100.00% 6	6	3.00
Avoiding plagiarism	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	100.00% 6	6	3.00
Writing quickly	66.67% 4	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	6	1.50

*Figure 6. Survey Writing Question 22 Response.*

It is important to note that 100.00% of the participants stated that they always use the following writing skills: using quotations and citing sources appropriately in the text, in footnotes, and/or a bibliography, grammatical accuracy in written work, using correct punctuation, and avoiding plagiarism. Additionally, four out of the six responders (66.67%) stated that they “always” use the skill of combining information from outside sources.

In terms of their success at university (see Figure 7), 50.00% of the participants stated that summarizing, paraphrasing, and synthesizing information as well as using quotations were extremely important to their success.

**How important is each skill to your success in your University coursework:**

	Not applicable to my field	Not very important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important	Extremely important	Total	Weighted Average
Planning and outlining drafts	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	6	3.83
Writing drafts	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	50.00% 3	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	6	3.83
Revising drafts	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	50.00% 3	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	6	3.83
Summarizing, paraphrasing, and synthesizing information from outside sources	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	50.00% 3	6	4.83
Evaluating resources	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	6	4.67
Using quotations and citing sources appropriately in the text, in footnotes and/or a bibliography	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	50.00% 3	0.00% 0	50.00% 3	6	5.00
Grammatical accuracy in written work	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	50.00% 3	33.33% 2	6	5.17
Using correct punctuation	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	6	5.00
Avoiding plagiarism	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	50.00% 3	33.33% 2	6	5.17
Writing quickly	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	6	2.83

*Figure 7. Survey Writing Question 23 Response.*

Additionally, 50.00% of participants state that grammatical accuracy in written work as well as avoiding plagiarism were very important to their success and writing drafts, revising drafts, and using quotations were important skills for their success. They indicated that planning and outlining drafts was somewhat important to their success and that writing quickly was not very important to their success.

The responses to question 24 from the survey are notable because the majority of participants disclosed that they were not extremely prepared for any of the stated writing skills before coming to university (see Figure 8).

**How prepared were you for these kinds of academic writing skills before you came to this University?:**

	Not applicable to my field	Not very prepared	Somewhat prepared	Prepared	Very prepared	Extremely prepared	Total	Weighted Average
Planning and outlining drafts	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	83.33% 5	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6	3.83
Writing drafts	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	83.33% 5	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6	3.83
Revising drafts	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	66.67% 4	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6	3.67
Summarizing, paraphrasing, and synthesizing information from outside sources	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	6	3.67
Evaluating resources	0.00% 0	50.00% 3	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	6	3.17
Using quotations and citing sources appropriately in the text, in footnotes and/or a bibliography	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	6	3.50
Grammatical accuracy in written work	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	50.00% 3	16.67% 1	6	4.67
Using correct punctuation	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	6	4.50
Avoiding plagiarism	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	50.00% 3	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	6	4.17
Writing quickly	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6	2.67

*Figure 8. Survey Writing Question 24 Response.*

Participants responded that they were somewhat prepared to prepared for summarizing, paraphrasing, and synthesizing information from outside sources, which are skills that they identified as extremely important to their success in university and always use these skills in their previous responses. Additionally, for the “using quotations and citing sources appropriately in the text, in footnotes and/or bibliography” skill, there was a complete spread in the level of preparation for this question. This is striking because this is a skill that participants stated was extremely important to their success at university and is a skill they always must use. Participants stated that they were prepared for planning and outlining drafts and writing drafts, revising drafts and avoiding plagiarism.

**Listening skills results.** The third skill section of the survey focused on listening skills. Figure 9, below, shows the survey results on how participants responded to how frequently they use specific listening skills in their English language university coursework.

**Please use the following scale to indicate to what degree you use each of the following skills in your university courses:**

	Rarely	Sometimes	Always	Total	Weighted Average
Understanding and following oral instructions	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	83.33% 5	6	2.83
Taking notes effectively during teacher-centered lectures	0.00% 0	66.67% 4	33.33% 2	6	2.33
Take notes effectively while watching supplemental, audio or audio-visual materials	16.67% 1	50.00% 3	33.33% 2	6	2.17
Distinguishing between main and secondary ideas during lecture	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	66.67% 4	6	2.50
Distinguishing between ideas and examples during lecture	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	83.33% 5	6	2.83
Understanding technical vocabulary or jargon	0.00% 0	66.67% 4	33.33% 2	6	2.33
Ability to see relationships between ideas or different segments of the lecture(s)	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	66.67% 4	6	2.67
Ability to synthesize information from lecture with other sources of information such as textbooks	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	66.67% 4	6	2.67
Ability to understand other students' questions or comments during class	0.00% 0	50.00% 3	50.00% 3	6	2.50

*Figure 9. Survey Listening Question 27 Response.*

It is important to note that five out of the six respondents (83.33%) stated that they always use the listening skills of understanding and following oral instructions as well as distinguishing between ideas and examples during lecture. Additionally, most participants also responded that they always used the skill of distinguishing between main and secondary ideas during lecture (66.67%) and the listening skill of the ability to synthesize information from lecture with other sources of information such as textbooks (66.67%). Participants identified that they only sometimes used the skill of taking notes effectively during teacher-centered lectures (66.67%), understanding technical vocabulary or jargon (66.67%), and taking notes effectively while listening to supplemental, audio or audio-visual materials (50.00%).

The listening section was the first section where participants were divided equally between skills and their importance. As seen in Figure 10, 50.00% of participants stated that distinguishing between main and secondary ideas during lecture and distinguishing between

ideas and examples during lecture was very important and the other 50.00% of participants stated that it was important to their success as university.

**For each skill, please rate how important it is for your success at University:**

	Not applicable to my field	Not very important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important	Extremely important	Total	Weighted Average
Understanding and following oral instructions	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	50.00% 3	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	6	4.83
Taking notes effectively during teacher-centered lectures	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	50.00% 3	0.00% 0	6	4.17
Take notes effectively while watching supplemental, audio or audio-visual materials	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	6	3.50
Distinguishing between main and secondary ideas during lecture	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	50.00% 3	50.00% 3	0.00% 0	6	4.50
Distinguishing between ideas and examples during lecture	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	50.00% 3	50.00% 3	0.00% 0	6	4.50
Understanding technical vocabulary or jargon	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	66.67% 4	16.67% 1	6	5.00
Ability to see relationships between ideas or different segments of the lecture(s)	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	50.00% 3	16.67% 1	6	4.83
Ability to synthesize information from lecture with other sources of information such as textbooks	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	66.67% 4	0.00% 0	6	4.67
Ability to understand other students' questions or comments during class	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	6	5.00

*Figure 10. Survey Listening Question 29 Response.*

Additionally, participants were equally divided by 33.33% between important, very important, and extremely important for the following listening skills: understanding and following oral instructions and ability to understand other participants' questions or comments during class. The majority of participants (66.67%) were also in agreement that the listening skills of understanding technical vocabulary and the ability to synthesize information from lecture with other sources of information such as textbooks were very important skills for their success in university.

Figure 11 below illustrates the student responses to the level of their preparedness for these kinds of listening skills.

**Please use the following scale to indicate to what degree you feel you were prepared for these skills before you came to University:**

	Not applicable to my field	Not very prepared	Somewhat prepared	Prepared	Very prepared	Extremely prepared	Total	Weighted Average
Understanding and following oral instructions	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	6	4.67
Taking notes effectively during teacher-centered lectures –	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	50.00% 3	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	6	3.67
Take notes effectively while watching supplemental, audio or audio-visual materials	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	50.00% 3	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6	3.17
Distinguishing between main and secondary ideas during lecture	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	83.33% 5	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6	3.17
Distinguishing between ideas and examples during lecture	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	66.67% 4	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	6	4.00
Understanding technical vocabulary or jargon	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	50.00% 3	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6	3.17
Ability to see relationships between ideas or different segments of the lecture(s)	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	50.00% 3	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	6	3.83
Ability to combine information from lecture with other sources of information such as textbooks	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	66.67% 4	0.00% 0	6	4.33
Ability to understand other students' questions or comments during class	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	6	4.00

*Figure 11. Survey Listening Question 28 Response.*

Most participants (83.33%) responded that they were only somewhat prepared for distinguishing between main and secondary ideas during lecture and 50.00% stated that they were somewhat prepared for understanding technical vocabulary or jargon. What is notable about these responses is that in question 27, where students needed to indicate to what degree they use each skill in their university courses, 66.67% of students responded that they always have to use the skill of distinguishing between main and secondary ideas during lecture as well as the understanding technical vocabulary or jargon in their university courses. Participants felt very prepared (66.67%) combining information from lecture with other sources of information such as textbooks.

**Speaking skills.** The fourth skill section of the survey focused on speaking skills and Figure 12, below, shows the survey results on how students responded to how frequently they use specific speaking skills in their English language university coursework.

**Please use the following scale to indicate to what degree you include each of the following skills in your English language university courses:**

	Rarely	Sometimes	Always	Total	Weighted Average
Ability to ask for help, clarification, or information	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	83.33% 5	6	2.67
Ability to explain or justify answers	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	50.00% 3	6	2.33
Ability to define or describe concepts	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	66.67% 4	6	2.50
Giving peer feedback	0.00% 0	83.33% 5	16.67% 1	6	2.17
Participating in a group discussion by stating points of view, agreeing, disagreeing, giving reasons and interrupting	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	83.33% 5	6	2.83
Giving an oral presentation	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	66.67% 4	6	2.50
Summarizing or paraphrasing materials	0.00% 0	50.00% 3	50.00% 3	6	2.50
Describing processes	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	66.67% 4	6	2.33
Verbalizing numerical data	50.00% 3	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	6	1.83
Conducting interviews	50.00% 3	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	6	1.67

*Figure 12. Survey Speaking Question 32 Response.*

The results of this question are noteworthy due to the high percentages of skills used in the “always” section. Unlike the results of the reading, writing, and listening skills, the responses of the students for the speaking section indicate that they constantly use their speaking skills. It is important to note in Figure 13 that the results of how important each of the speaking skills are to the participants for their success in university were very dispersed with no consistent groupings.



**Please use the following scale to indicate how important each of the following skills in your English language university courses:**

	Not applicable to my field	Not very important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important	Extremely important	Total	Weighted Average
Ability to ask for help, clarification, or information	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	50.00% 3	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	6	4.83
Ability to explain or justify answers	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	6	5.00
Ability to define or describe concepts	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	50.00% 3	33.33% 2	6	5.17
Participating in a group discussion by stating points of view, agreeing, disagreeing, giving reasons and/interrupting	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	50.00% 3	33.33% 2	6	5.17
Giving an oral presentation	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	6	4.67
Summarizing or paraphrasing materials	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	6	4.50
Describing processes	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	6	3.33
Verbalizing numerical data	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	6	3.33
Conducting interviews	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	6	3.17

*Figure 13. Survey Speaking Question 33 Response.*

50.00% of the participant responses stated that the ability to ask for help, clarification, or information was an important skill. Additionally, 50.00% also identified that the ability to define or describe concepts as well as participating in group discussions by stating points of view, agreeing, disagreeing, giving reasons and/interrupting were very important skills to have for their success at university.

The results shown in Figure 14 are important because they reveal that participants did not feel very prepared or extremely prepared for any of the speaking skills before coming to university.

**How prepared were you for these kinds of skills before you came to this university?:**

	Not applicable to my field	Not very prepared	Somewhat prepared	Prepared	Very prepared	Extremely prepared	Total	Weighted Average
Ability to ask for help, clarification, or information	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	6	4.00
Ability to explain or justify answers	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	6	4.17
Ability to define or describe concepts	0.00% 0	20.00% 1	20.00% 1	40.00% 2	20.00% 1	0.00% 0	5	3.60
Giving peer feedback	0.00% 0	50.00% 3	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6	2.67
Participating in a group discussion by stating points of view, agreeing, disagreeing, giving reasons and interrupting	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	6	3.17
Giving an oral presentation	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	50.00% 3	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6	3.33
Summarizing or paraphrasing materials	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	50.00% 3	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	6	3.50
Describing processes -	40.00% 2	20.00% 1	20.00% 1	20.00% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	5	2.20
Verbalizing numerical data	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6	2.50
Conducting interviews	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6	2.00

*Figure 14. Survey Speaking Question 34 Response.*

These findings are notable because Figure 12 illustrated the high percentages of speaking skills that were used in the “always” section. Unlike the results of the reading, writing, and listening skills, the responses of the participants for the speaking section indicate that they constantly use their speaking skills and it is noteworthy that participants felt unprepared for speaking skills before coming to university when it is the expectation to frequently use these specific speaking skills in their American university coursework.

**Academic culture.** In addition to the survey questions being categorized into English language proficiency skills, the survey also contained an Academic Culture category. Figure 15 shows the survey results on how prepared participants felt before they left their home country with academic expectations and workload at university, college placement tests (such as TOEFL), and time management and study skills.

**Please indicate to what degree you believe you were prepared before you left your home country to handle the following:**

	Unprepared	Not very prepared	Somewhat prepared	Prepared	Very prepared	Total	Weighted Average
Academic expectations and workload	0.00% 0	60.00% 3	20.00% 1	20.00% 1	0.00% 0	5	2.60
College placement tests (such as TOEFL)	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	80.00% 4	20.00% 1	5	4.20
Time management and study skills	0.00% 0	20.00% 1	0.00% 0	80.00% 4	0.00% 0	5	3.60

*Figure 15. Survey Academic Success Question 41 Response.*

The results of this survey question are noteworthy because 80.00% of participants felt prepared for their college placement tests and time management and study skills, but 60.00% were not very prepared for the academic expectations and workload at university.

Participants were also asked to state how aware they were of specific academic culture and support processes before they left their home country (see Figure 16).

**Please indicate to what degree you believe you were aware of the following before you left your home country:**

	Unaware	Not very aware	Somewhat aware	Aware	Very aware	Total	Weighted Average
Academic honesty	0.00% 0	20.00% 1	20.00% 1	20.00% 1	40.00% 2	5	3.80
College admission and financial aid in the United States of America	20.00% 1	40.00% 2	0.00% 0	40.00% 2	0.00% 0	5	2.60
College student services	20.00% 1	40.00% 2	40.00% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	5	2.20
Student teacher roles in the United States of America	0.00% 0	80.00% 4	20.00% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	5	2.20

*Figure 16. Survey Academic Success Question 42 Response.*

It is important to focus on what participants were not very aware of with these responses; 80.00% of participants responded that they were not very aware of student/teacher roles in the United States of America and the majority of participants were “unaware” to “somewhat aware” of college student services before they left their home country.

Interestingly, in Figure 17, where participants were asked to indicate how important these skills were to the success at university, 60.00% of participants stated that college student services were very important to their success at university.

**For each skill, please use the following scale to indicate how important it is to your success at university:**

	Not applicable to my field	Not very important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important	Extremely important	Total	Weighted Average
Academic honesty	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	20.00% 1	40.00% 2	40.00% 2	5	5.20
College admission and financial aid in the United States of America-	20.00% 1	20.00% 1	0.00% 0	20.00% 1	40.00% 2	0.00% 0	5	3.40
College student services	20.00% 1	20.00% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	60.00% 3	0.00% 0	5	3.60
Student teacher roles in the United States of America	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	20.00% 1	40.00% 2	40.00% 2	0.00% 0	5	4.20

*Figure 17. Survey Academic Success Question 43 Response.*

Additionally, for the importance of student/teacher roles in the United States for their success at university, 40.00% of participants stated that it was important and another 40.00% of participants stated that it was very important.

**Method of classroom and faculty instruction.** Instruction methods was another important section of the survey questions. Figure 18 illustrates the percentage of classroom time the faculty instructor dedicates to specific instructional techniques.

**Please use the scale below to indicate the percentage of classroom time your faculty instructor dedicates to each instructional technique:**

	Never	1-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%	Total	Weighted Average
Instructor lecture	0.00% 0	14.29% 1	57.14% 4	14.29% 1	14.29% 1	7	3.29
In-class group activities	0.00% 0	28.57% 2	57.14% 4	0.00% 0	14.29% 1	7	3.00
Individual or group projects or class assignments	0.00% 0	28.57% 2	28.57% 2	42.86% 3	0.00% 0	7	3.14
Student-led activities such as presentations or demonstrations	0.00% 0	57.14% 4	14.29% 1	14.29% 1	14.29% 1	7	2.86
Internships or service-learning	71.43% 5	28.57% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	7	1.29
Field trips	57.14% 4	42.86% 3	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	7	1.43
Guest Speakers	28.57% 2	28.57% 2	42.86% 3	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	7	2.14

*Figure 18. Survey Faculty Instructional Methods Question 8 Response.*

The results of Figure 19 are notable because they show how participants rated the importance of these instructional methods to their success at university. 42.86% of participants stated that instructor-led teaching techniques were very important to their success at university. Additionally, 57.14% of participants stated that in-class group activities instructional methods were important to their success. 42.86% stated that student-led activities such as presentations or demonstrations instructional methods were important to their success.

**For each instructional method, please rate how important it is for your success at university:**

	Not applicable to my field	Not very important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important	Extremely important	Total	Weighted Average
Instructor-led	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	14.29% 1	28.57% 2	42.86% 3	14.29% 1	7	4.57
In-class group activities	0.00% 0	14.29% 1	14.29% 1	57.14% 4	14.29% 1	0.00% 0	7	3.71
Individual or group projects or class assignments	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	14.29% 1	42.86% 3	42.86% 3	0.00% 0	7	4.29
Student-led activities such as presentations or demonstrations	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	28.57% 2	42.86% 3	28.57% 2	0.00% 0	7	4.00
Internships or service-learning	14.29% 1	0.00% 0	42.86% 3	14.29% 1	0.00% 0	28.57% 2	7	3.71
Field trips	42.86% 3	14.29% 1	42.86% 3	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	7	2.00
Guest speakers	0.00% 0	14.29% 1	42.86% 3	28.57% 2	0.00% 0	14.29% 1	7	3.57

*Figure 19. Survey Faculty Instructional Methods Question 9 Response.*

Participants were also asked to state how prepared they were for these kinds of faculty instruction and instructional methods before they left their home country (see Figure 20).

**How prepared were you for these kinds of faculty instruction and instructional methods before you came to this University?:**

#	Responses	Date
1	It's mostly the same in my country	5/19/2017 12:13 PM
2	I am used to mostly 100% instructor-led classes, so that interactive or group projects are such a big part of classes was somewhat new to me. I wouldn't say that I wasn't prepared though, it was something new I was excited about because adding interactive components to instruction made most of my classes a lot more interesting for me.	5/17/2017 7:00 PM
3	Somewhat prepared	5/15/2017 1:17 PM
4	Not very prepared. I was used to lecture-based instruction so, getting used to group work and assignments was a bit challenging.	5/12/2017 4:23 PM
5	somewhat prepared	5/12/2017 2:33 PM
6	I read the materials before class	5/8/2017 5:18 PM
7	Very well prepared	5/4/2017 10:44 AM

*Figure 20. Survey Faculty Instructional Methods Question 10 Response.*

It is important to note that most participants were “somewhat prepared” for these kinds of instructional methods before coming to study in the United States. Interestingly, some participants detailed that they came from mostly lecture-based instructor led classroom teaching methods and found the focus on interactive group projects to be new and challenging.

### **Student Interview**

As outlined in Chapter Three, a series of interviews were conducted with two ESL international students after they submitted their quantitative survey results. The two students who were selected to be interviewed for this study were selected due to their academic experiences and home countries representing a diverse spectrum within student experiences. The questions asked of each participant were slightly different based on their survey responses (see Appendix B). The qualitative results of these interviews are reported based on the unique individual experiences of the students along with some of my comments as well as any other relevant insights. The qualitative results will help illuminate recommendations on how American higher

education educators can better support ESL international students to be both academically and culturally successful at American university.

**Rosaline.** Rosaline is a graduate student from Argentina who has been studying English Language and Literature and has a teaching career in her home country. In primary and secondary school, Rosaline didn't have a lot of English language experiences so she started taking private lessons where English was taught as a foreign language. Then she started teacher training university courses in Argentina where courses were in English. This is when she learned more about English and became more proficient. Her courses included English Language, Grammar and Phonetics, History of the British Isles and Americans, and Literature. During her undergraduate degree in Argentina, Rosaline wasn't able to study abroad in an English speaking country but she did have professional conference experiences that included travel to the United States after she graduated from college.

Throughout her survey responses, Rosaline stated that she felt prepared for the English language skills that she needed to use in her university coursework. Where she did feel underprepared was with technological literacy and post-secondary academic culture in the United States. In her survey response, Rosaline stated that online research is a skill that incoming international students need in order to be successful in a university environment.

When asked to expand on her rationale for this, she stated:

"This [online research] was a new thing to me. I have tried to research back home, but I didn't know that there was a special class where you will be told how to look for those papers. A librarian came to the class... So, I could have never done it without the help to search for something. It was there and I didn't know it was so accessible. This is another view that I have of education in the US, you tend to be very academic... You focus on

that from the very beginning where maybe in Argentina you tend to be more technical, then in the end you become more academic.”

Additionally, Rosaline stated that incoming international students need to be aware of the homework and assignment load in a US university environment in order to be successful, as well as the differences in classroom culture. When asked to elaborate, she responded:

“College here is more similar to high school in the sense of assignments – I had many courses and I had a lot of homework that I had to keep up with. In higher education in Argentina, you were just given the chapters to read, you go back home, you study, and then you take your exams... [In the US] be ready to work and to speak your mind because it is a more reciprocity classes; you are very welcome to participate in class. I felt that professors really liked when you made comments, make some kind of contribution. Be ready to do that if you like to do that because it will help you. Also ask for help because it is a very helpful environment.”

As noted above, Rosaline’s survey results indicated that she felt well prepared for the language demands in the four skills areas of the survey. However, there were some intriguing responses to the open-ended questions on her survey that led to the following series of interview questions.

**Academic writing question:** *Overall, you stated that you were very prepared/prepared for all the academic writing skills before you came to this university. If you did feel prepared, but the methodology was very different in your home country, such as using these skills at the end of your course of studies, what is it that prepared you for that at the beginning of your coursework?*

“Maybe it’s more like building blocks. In Argentina where I studied - you go from [English Language One]– writing a description of picture, then you go and write a story and then in English language two – start writing things that are more complex and



longer. I had four English language courses and in the third and fourth courses, the last years you have essay writings. So every month you have an essay that is a page and a half long. So I think that that helps you to build your skills in writing and then at the very end you have to write a five to ten page paper...Going back to the concept of building blocks, you start with simple things – write a description a paraphrase and then write a story.

Then as you find your language and you learn more vocabulary you try to show it in your writings.”

**Academic listening question:** *It seems that you were pretty prepared for academic listening skills before coming to university and you stated that all listening skills were very important. Why do you think listening skills are so very important for the success of ESL international students?*

“I think as I mentioned before, in the end the gist of something, or the key concepts or the key terms are given by your professors. So, the material you have to read is important but in the end you have to be very aware of what you’re hearing. So listening for key concepts, or what the professors are highlighting, or even what they are writing on the board, I think you should pay attention to those things. And I’ve heard some professors sometimes complaining, saying ‘I said this!’ when students didn’t do that in exams or a paper. We [in Argentina] are used to lecturing and also to paying attention to what the teacher is saying because it is important and it is something that is engrained in us. I felt sometimes that other students [in the US] would be using their phones and I thought, ‘how can you be using your phone [during lecture]. For me, you must be 100% paying attention to what the professor is saying.”

**Academic speaking question:** *Why are academic speaking skills so important to the success of ESL international students?*

“I think getting your message across, getting your ideas across and having a good rapport with your professor is definitely a part of your final assessment. Since this is a small college and courses are small – your speaking skills are part of your social skills and this is very important.”

It is clear from her survey and interview responses that Rosaline appears to be a proficient and confident student and English language speaker. However, her responses also reveal the importance of ESL international students understanding the digital research and homework demands in US higher education. Additionally, Rosaline stressed the need to use careful listening skills during lectures. Indeed, Rosaline’s perceived strength with listening skills stresses the necessity of proficiency in this skill for success.

The next interview participant, Larissa, represents a student who many not be as prepared as Rosaline for the demands of college in the United States.

**Larissa.** Larissa is an undergraduate student from Rwanda who has been studying Economics and Finance. From kindergarten, Larissa attended a French-language skill school and starting in primary school, she started her English as a foreign language classes. By fourth grade, all her classes were taught in English and she only had one hour of French during the week. In tenth grade she started to attend an American organized school and she then all of her coursework was taught in English.

Since Larissa came directly from high school in Rwanda to university in the United States, her survey results detailed that she had very mixed results for what she felt prepared for

and what she discovered she wasn't very prepared for and she had some important response to the following series of open-ended interview questions.

**Academic writing question:** *How did you become more confident in these writing skills while at university in the US? Were your other classmates learning these skills at the same time as well? Were you able to find support from university staff and faculty to improve these skills?*

“When I was at home we didn't really submit typed work that much and so we physically hand written everything. So it was easy to know if it was a grammatical mistake because they emphasized that in the first outline because it's so hard to erase it and go back and start all over.”

“I definitely thought that I was the only one who didn't get this because every time I go to a class I thought that most American students are a step further than I am and I have to work really hard to meet them where they are. That's why I have to go to the Writing Center as often as possible and talk to my professors and use any resources I can because most of [the domestic students] knew what plagiarizing was, they knew what citing sources was, they knew all the MLA and MPA style. I had no idea what that was so I had to talk to my professor. I mean I can ask in class but then I also fear that I am making everyone lag behind. So I definitely feel that I am behind but then I catch up with them.”

**Academic listening question:** *It seems that you were pretty prepared for academic listening skills before coming to university and you stated that all listening skills were very important. Why do you think listening skills are so very important for the success of ESL international students? What, if any, challenges do you still face?*

“I think because English is not our first language so definitely we have to listen more and pay more attention. The way I was prepared for listening in high school is that sometimes

a teacher would make jokes and then sometimes those jokes would be on the exam... so if you don't listen you miss it, so definitely we were prepared. But then here it became more important because sometimes teachers talk very fast and my English wasn't as good yet so I had to pay attention and not look aside and that's why I sit in the front row."

"Definitely some professors speak quickly and sometimes they use jokes that maybe American students understand but I have no idea what's going on so I just go along and think I don't think I understood that! It's not really hard and it has gotten better."

**Post-secondary academic culture question:** *You stated that you were not very prepared for the academic expectation and workload before you left your home country. Please provide a few examples of any surprises. How did you discover these expectations and how are you overcoming challenges?*

"In Rwanda we don't have assignments – we have maybe one big exam at the end and here it is the total opposite. Every week you have assignments, you have papers to turn in and that was a shock. But the more you do it the more you get used to it... I didn't expect this workload until I was faced with it. At home you either do well on the last exam or don't."

It is interesting to note that Rosaline had a similar experience in Argentina as Larissa did with her coursework in Rwanda.

*You also stated that you were not very aware of "academic honesty," "college admission and financial aid in the USA", and "student teacher roles in the USA." Why is academic honesty extremely important to your success at university?*

"As I learned about why you have to cite sources, I learned that there is work that goes into writing papers and you've got to respect the persons' work and how they

got there. So, in a way it is respecting people's work and actually acknowledging that this is something vital in your learning."

*Why is college student services very important to your success at university?*

"As a college student you know that you can use any service here because you have all these things going on – you have school work, you have to work, you have to maintain a social life, and balancing all that is really hard. So if you can get Academic Success to help you study for an exam or the Writing Center to help you with revising your papers or the International Student Office to help you with different things you can use any service you can get. So in a way they help you manage the stress and the hardships you're facing and help you have a healthy life."

It is important to note Larissa's resourcefulness due to her ability to utilize the on-campus resources and to understand the importance of these university support systems. Learning these skills in a new country are one key to how ESL international students can be successful.

*Why are student-teacher roles in the US important to your success at university?*

"So in Rwanda you called teachers by their last name and I never called professors by their first names but here [in the US] when a professors says you can call me by my first name... It's really important because you are at ease and you can ask [professors] questions whereas when you know you have this strict relationship you can't easily ask questions. The roles here are more relaxed, you can explore different things and you end up making good connections. You get to develop this great relationship that is professional but in a way helps you as a person and in your career as well."

**Additional question:** *What advice would you give someone coming to university in the States?*

“I wish I would have known how difficult it can be being a college student. At home students don’t work and everything is taken care of by their parents. So coming here I got independence, but independence came with a price! I definitely appreciate how it has helped me grow but I wish I would have been more prepared

“Make as many American friends as possible, that way you can practice your English as well has have a great social life. Definitely have a balanced life...And make use of any resource you can get – talk to your professors, talk to staff, talk to anyone.”

The results of Larissa’s survey and interview questions reveal that she felt that she had mixed levels of preparedness for her English language skills before coming to study in the US. She stated that she struggled with the new demands of coursework in her college classes and that she felt like she was the only student who was struggling because she wasn’t a native speaker of English. However, Larissa utilized the on-campus resources that were available to her as well used her faculty instructors for support by developing professional mentorship relationships with them due to the less formal student-teacher roles in the United States.

### **Summary**

In Chapter Four, I presented the results of the data collection process. The data collected was in service of attempting to answer the three guiding questions for this research. In Chapter Five, the final chapter, I will return to my literature review and discuss how key findings correlate with the results of my quantitative and qualitative data. I will then discuss the findings and implications based on those results which will look at some of the similarities, differences and overlap within the responses of the study participants. This chapter will also look at some of the limitations inherent to a study of this kind and reflect on the paper as a whole.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Conclusion**

The previous chapter looked at the results of the survey responses and two interviews that were conducted for this study in an attempt to answer the three guiding research questions of this study, which are:

- What are ESL international students' perceptions about their level of academic readiness for the expectations in American higher education settings?
- What are the academic challenges that ESL international students face in the context of an American higher education?
- How do international ESL students believe that American educators can better support them both culturally and academically?

This chapter will present the major findings of this mixed methods study, the limitations, some of the implications, and suggestions for further research.

### **Major Findings**

Several researchers have demonstrated that an acceptable admission test score is not necessarily an adequate predictor of academic success in the US higher education setting, however, these studies have not looked at students' own perceptions about how prepared they feel they are for the demands of higher education in the US. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to investigate whether there are gaps between ESL international students' current academic preparation, to learn what international students' perceptions are of their level of

academic preparation from their home country, and what they state is expected of them in a higher education setting the in US.

### **ESL International Students' Perceptions of their Academic Readiness**

**US Higher Education Academic and Workload Expectations.** It is worthy of attention that 80.00% of participants stated that they felt “prepared” for their college placement tests (such as TOEFL) and time management and study skills, but then 60.00% detailed that they felt that they were “not very prepared” for the academic expectations and workload at university. Indeed, the results of Larissa’s interview questions reinforced the survey findings when she detailed that she struggled with the new demands of coursework in her college classes and that she felt like she was the only student who was struggling because she wasn’t a native speaker of English. Even Rosaline also stressed the importance of ESL international students understanding of the homework demands in US higher education in her interview responses even though she was a highly proficient and confident student and English language speaker. These findings are consistent with Coles & Swami’s (2012) research that ESL international students’ adjustment to university structures significantly diminished as their first year of university progressed. Their study showed that the current university structures only focused on harvesting cultural and academic adjustment for ESL international students at the beginning of the year. This adjustment focus wore off as the semesters went on due to assignment pressure and students adapting and establishing friendships.

Additionally, most participants reported that they were only “somewhat prepared” for the variety of instructional teaching methods listed before coming to study in the United States (see Figure 21). In fact, 42.86% of participants stated that 51-75% of their faculty use individual or group projects and class assignments, which was new and challenging to them because they



detailed that they came from mostly lecture-based instructor led classroom teaching methods in their home countries. Also, 80.00% of participants responded that they were “not very aware” of student/teacher roles in the United States of America and the majority of participants were “unaware” to “somewhat aware” of college student services before they left their home country. Interestingly, 60.00% of participants stated later that college student services were “very important” to their success at university.

These findings are consistent with Nieto & Booth’s (2010) research, which revealed that conflicts can occur when students and instructors come from different cultural backgrounds. These conflicts can be related to contrasts in teaching styles, classroom engagement expectations, as well as second language environments. It is apparent that US higher education institutions must be more transparent about the academic expectations and workload at university with ESL international students as well as stressing the importance of utilizing on-campus resources. In the case of my university, student-faculty mentoring relationships are an important factor to student success due to the less formal student-teacher roles in the United States. As seen with Larissa’s interview responses, she utilized the on-campus resources that were available to her as well her faculty instructors for support and this helped her to better immerse herself in the academic culture at her institution.

**English Language Proficiency Skills – Perceived Gaps and Alignments.** In the quantitative survey, the questions were designed to determine learner perceptions about (a) the basic academic skills expected in university level coursework; (b) common modes of instruction used in their classes; (c) common English language skills expected in a university setting; and (d) their level of college readiness. The survey included sections on academic reading, writing,

listening, speaking, as well as the amount of time students spent on weekly assignments and what they wished they had known before entering university level coursework.

For the reading-skills findings, it is important to note that there were no “very extremely prepared” participants for reading skills before coming to university. This is notable because students reported earlier in the survey that proficiency in reading skills was “important” to their success at university and that they also “always have to utilize these skills in their classes.” Additionally, for the speaking skills findings, participants revealed that they did not feel “very prepared” or “extremely prepared” for any of the speaking skills before coming to university. These findings are notable because students reported that they “always” used speaking skills (see Figure 13) and unlike the results of the reading, writing, and listening skills, the responses of the participants for the speaking section indicated that ESL international students are constantly using their speaking skills; therefore, it is noteworthy that participants felt unprepared for speaking skills before coming to university when it is the expectation to frequently use these specific speaking skills in their English language university coursework, which is in contrast to the norm in many of their home universities.

Participants stated that they were “prepared” for planning and outlining drafts and writing drafts, revising drafts and avoiding plagiarism in the writing skills findings. However, there were inconsistent results for the “using quotations and citing sources appropriately in the text, in footnotes and/or bibliography” skills, which is striking because this is a skill that participants stated was “extremely important” to their success at university and is a skill they always must use. Overall, the majority of participants disclosed that they were not extremely prepared for any of the stated writing skills before coming to university (see Figure 9). The listening skill findings

show that most participants were “somewhat prepared” to “prepared” for listening skills before coming to study in the United States.

### **Limitations**

This study had limitations as it was very small. For the quantitative survey portion of my data collection, I was only able to recruit eight ESL international students to participate in the survey. In addition, only six participants consistently responded to the majority of the survey questions. It should be noted that this does not represent all international students and their experiences, but only a small number at small liberal arts university. If I was to recreate this study again, having a larger participant pool would be a benefit to verify trends or inconsistencies with the findings.

Additionally, in hindsight, it would have been beneficial to include more detailed and specific questions about students’ academic experiences in their home country in each of the survey categories. There were times during my analysis when I wanted to know what their perceptions were when they studied back in their home countries in order to look for connections between the results of their perceptions while at university. It would have been beneficial to add additional questions to the survey questions asking: “please indicate to what degree you used the following skills in your home country” as well as “how important was each skill to your success in your classes in your home country?” These findings would have helped to verify and evaluate gaps or alignments in students’ experiences at university and would have provided an even more robust survey analysis.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study reveal that ESL international students may have the English language proficiency skills to be admitted to US higher education institutions. However, there

needs to be a more significant level of transparency and discussion from US higher education institutions to ESL international students in regard to the demands of the academic rigor and extensive immersion of their English language skills.

Based on the findings of my data some concrete steps my institution could take to better prepare and be more transparent with incoming ESL international students are:

- Include opportunities for prospective ESL international students to engage with the academic culture before coming to campus

Many more US higher education institutions want to recruit ESL international students to study at their universities. However, the common recruitment tactics that are used to recruit domestic students aren't as crucial for international students. As part of the Admissions recruitment process, it would be instructive for my university to offer ESL international student access to popular recorded or filmed lectures so students can capture a real-life experience of being in a class before they arrive and begin their studies. It would also help to provide class syllabus examples in a variety of academic areas for students to review the workload, classroom expectations, as well as assessment and grading procedures. It would also be beneficial for my university to offer scheduled opportunities for students to chat or Skype with university faculty and staff to discuss their questions and concerns about studying in the United States.

- Provide consistent onboarding and support from the University after ESL international students arrive

My research revealed that ESL international students simply aren't prepared for the academic expectations and workload at an American university, even if they have acquired the appropriate English language proficiency exam score to gain admissions entrance into university. The

additional experiences of moving away from the familiarity and confidence of a home country, completely immersing and engaging in the English language and an English-speaking academic culture, as well as absorbing new classroom expectations is overwhelming for ESL international students. To best support ESL international students, continuous support, especially through their first academic year, is vital. Having individual mid-semester and end of semester check-ins with ESL international students would help with not only their academic support but also help with their personal support as well.

- Share my findings with the faculty and international education center at my university

The perspectives and experiences of ESL international students aren't very well understood at my university by most faculty and staff. Sharing my findings with the international education center at my university as well as with faculty would give insight into what many international students face and lead to initiatives on how on-campus support can improve the transition into US higher education for these students.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

First, further research should be conducted on the role of US higher education Admissions offices in the recruitment of international students. Gaining detailed attitudes and recruitment tactics from a diverse population of institutions could shed light on the positive and effective strategies used when recruiting ESL international students. This research could also be used to enhance the current Admission requirements for international students to better prepared them for studying in the United States rather than simply looking at their English language proficiency exam scores.

Another call for further research would be to replicate Johnson and Parrish's (2010) study by asking university faculty what they think is needed for support in their classroom settings for ESL international students. The faculty perspective would detail faculty members' expectations and further elucidate any gaps or alignments between student experiences and university expectations. It could reveal faculty members' knowledge about supports needed for international students at their university. It would also detail their feedback on ESL international students' academic preparedness in their classrooms.

It would also be important to have further research focusing on the difference in the needs of undergraduate ESL international students and graduate ESL international students compared to the needs of US domestic students. It would be instructive to track a group of students when they arrive and continuously survey them during their academic career. The tracking should include interview questions or quantitative surveys to inquire about what students think they needed at the beginning of their university coursework and continue to need during their studies. Additionally, it would be necessary to look at larger groups of international students and categorize them into regional groups to see if the needs of international students differ depending on their home countries and worldview. This research would be helpful to detail the differences and diversity of student needs for each variety of student groups.

### **Final Reflections**

My work as an outgoing Education Abroad Advisor in higher education has shown me firsthand the challenges that college level non-native English speakers are faced with when transitioning into American academic culture. Seeing these experiences guided me to pursue this study and to design the research questions. Overall, I wanted to discover what ESL international students' perceptions are of their level of academic readiness for the expectations in American higher education settings; find what are the academic challenges that ESL international students

face in the context of an American higher education; and how international ESL students believe that American educators can better support them both culturally and academically.

My data collection has been conducted and analyzed, and my findings have been presented and discussed, but what have I taken away from my research findings as a professional in the field of International Education? Firstly, it is important to always remember that ESL international students must consistently work harder than native English speakers in their coursework just to simply be able to comprehend and follow in-class lectures and reading assignments. This really struck a chord with me when I conducted my interviews with Larissa and Rosaline and they stressed the importance of listening skills while at university in the United States. When asked to expand on her experiences with listening in her college classes, Larissa stated:

“Here [at university in the United States] it became more important [to listen carefully during classes] because sometimes teachers talk very fast and my English wasn’t as good yet so I had to pay attention and not look aside and that’s why I sit in the front row.”

“Definitely some professors speak quickly and sometimes they use jokes that maybe American students understand but I have no idea what’s going on so I just go along and think I don’t think I understood that! It’s not really hard and it has gotten better.”

It is easy to forget as a native speaker of English how much skill, energy, and concentration goes into comprehending what is heard and understanding the speakers meaning. For educators working in higher education in the United States, it is vital to remember this when working with ESL international students.

Additionally, I learned from my findings that it is extremely important to question how appropriate English language proficiency placement tests are if students are well prepared for the

examinations but unprepared for the academic expectations and workload of university in the United States. It is not enough to have English language proficiency test scores for incoming ESL international students and universities must find additional ways of support to ensure that incoming international students are prepared for success when entering university.

### **Conclusion**

My research details that ESL international students perceive that they aren't very prepared for a variety of academic expectations in American higher education settings. They face academic challenges in the intensity of speaking, listening, reading, and writing demands in English in both their public and private spheres. They also face new technological demands and classroom engagement expectations that impact their time and confidence. American educators can better support ESL international students both culturally and academically by understanding the unique challenges these students face. The implementation of more transparent Admissions requirement procedures, explicit engagement with academic expectations before they arrive in the United States, as well as increased attention to students during their first academic year at the university will increase ESL international students' success and retention while studying in the United States.



## **APPENDIX A**

### **Survey of Academic Readiness**

For this study, I will send out a questionnaire asking questions about your academic experiences at your university in your home country as well as your academic experience in an American university classroom. The questionnaire can be conducted in the privacy of your dorm or and at a time that is convenient for you. The questionnaire will take a total of 30 minutes to one hour. After the questionnaires are complete and a preliminary analysis has been completed, I may send a copy via email of what I have written and ask that you review it for accuracy. I may also follow up with you for a follow-up interview. The interviews will be audio recorded and will be conducted in a private study room at a local location that is convenient for you. Each interview will be approximately an hour in length and refreshments will be provided.

The results of this study will be very valuable since there are very few studies that ask ESL international students about their academic experiences in an American university setting. The results of this study will be beneficial for educators who work with ESL international students in a higher education setting.

#### **A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

1. Are you a graduate or undergraduate international student?
2. Are you a degree-seeking or visiting international student?
3. How long have you been studying at this University?
4. What is your area of study/major(s)/minor(s)?
5. Where is your home country?
6. What do you identify as your native language(s)?

#### **B. METHOD OF CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION EXPERIENCE**

1. Delivery of instruction:  
Please click on the ways that you currently receive instruction from your professors.
  - a. Online instruction
  - b. Blended instruction (combining online and traditional classroom instruction)
  - c. Self-directed, individualized learning plans
  - d. On-site classroom instruction
2. Faculty Instructional Techniques:  
Please use the scale below to indicate the percentage of classroom time your faculty instructor dedicates to each instructional technique
  - a. Instructor lecture – Never, 1-25%, 26-50%, 51-75%, 76-100%
  - b. In-class group activities - Never, 1-25%, 26-50%, 51-75%, 76-100%
  - c. Individual or group projects or class assignments - Never, 1-25%, 26-50%, 51-75%, 76-100%
  - d. Student-led activities such as presentations or demonstrations - Never, 1-25%, 26-50%, 51-75%, 76-100%
  - e. Internships or service-learning - Never, 1-25%, 26-50%, 51-75%, 76-100%
  - f. Field trips - Never, 1-25%, 26-50%, 51-75%, 76-100%
  - g. Guest speakers - Never, 1-25%, 26-50%, 51-75%, 76-100%

h. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

3. For each instructional technique, please rate how important it is for your success at university.
- a. Instructor-led – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - b. In-class group activities - Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - c. Individual or group projects or class assignments - Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - d. Student-led activities such as presentations or demonstrations - Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - e. Internships or service-learning - Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - f. Field trips - Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - g. Guest speakers - Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

- 4. How prepared were you for these kinds of faculty instruction and instructional techniques before you came to this University?
- 5. How frequently were there types of instructional techniques used in courses in your home country?
- 6. Share other types of instructional techniques used in your country:

**C. ACADEMIC READING:**

- 2. What types of texts or reading materials are you assigned in your classes? Click all that apply
  - a. Textbooks
  - b. Journal articles
  - c. Magazine or newspaper articles
  - d. Works of fiction
  - e. Memoirs or biographies
  - f. Technical drawings, graphs, or charts
- 3. What is the average length of your weekly reading assignments for all your classes? Click the response that best answers the question

- a. 1-15 pages
  - b. 16-30 pages
  - c. 31-50 pages
  - d. 51 pages or more
  
4. For each skill, please use the following scale to indicate to what degree you use the following skills in your English language university courses:
  - a. Understanding and following written instructions – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - b. Reading efficiently – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - c. Understanding and analyzing data from graphs, charts, and diagrams – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - d. Distinguishing main ideas from secondary ideas – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - e. Distinguishing fact from opinion – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - f. Taking notes on information read/heard – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - g. Identifying and organizing new, field-specific vocabulary – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - h. Evaluating the value of information read – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - i. Synthesizing information from multiple texts – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - j. Using the contents and index pages to find information – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - k. Using a dictionary, thesaurus, or other reference book – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - l. Accurately reading measurements on technical or laboratory equipment – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - m. Comments \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. For each skill, please use the following scale to indicate how important it is to your success at university
  - a. Understanding and following written instructions – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - b. Reading efficiently: comprehension and appropriate speed – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - c. Understanding and analyzing data from graphs, charts, and diagrams – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - d. Distinguishing main ideas from secondary ideas – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important

- e. Distinguishing fact from opinion – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - f. Taking notes on information read/heard – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - g. Identifying and organizing new, field-specific vocabulary – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - h. Evaluating the value of information read – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - i. Synthesizing information from multiple texts – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - j. Using the contents and index pages to find information – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - k. Using a dictionary, thesaurus, or other reference book – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - l. Accurately reading measurements on technical or laboratory equipment – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - m. Comments \_\_\_\_\_
6. How prepared were you for these kinds of reading skills before you came to this University:
- a. Understanding and following written instructions – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - b. Reading efficiently: comprehension and appropriate speed – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - c. Understanding and analyzing data from graphs, charts, and diagrams – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - d. Distinguishing main ideas from secondary ideas – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - e. Distinguishing fact from opinion – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared

- f. Taking notes on information read/heard – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
- g. Identifying and organizing new, field-specific vocabulary – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
- h. Evaluating the value of information read – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
- i. Use and combine information from multiple sources (books, lectures, videos, articles)– Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
- j. Using the contents and index pages to find information – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
- k. Using a dictionary, thesaurus, or other reference book – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
- l. Accurately reading measurements on technical or laboratory equipment – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared

7. How frequently were these types reading skills used in your English language courses in your home country?

#### **D. ACADEMIC WRITING**

1. What type of writing assignments are you assigned by your faculty instructors? Click all that apply.
  - a. Essays
  - b. Reports
  - c. Research papers
  - d. Paragraphs or short answer questions
  - e. Reader response journals
  - f. In-class writing exams
  - g. I do not get writing assignments in my classes
  - h. Other \_\_\_\_\_
2. During your academic semester, what is the average number of writing assignments that you are assigned? Click the one response that best answers the question.
  - a. 0
  - b. 1-2
  - c. 3-4
  - d. 5 or more

3. What is the average length that you are required to write for your assignments? Click the one response that best answers the questions.
  - a. 1 page or less
  - b. 2-3 pages
  - c. 4-6 pages
  - d. 7 or more
  
4. Please use the following scale to indicate to what degree you include each of the following skills in your university classes:  
 How often do your professors have you:
  - a. Plan and outlining drafts – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - b. Writing drafts – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - c. Revising drafts – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - d. Combine information from outside sources – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - e. Evaluating resources – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - f. Using quotations and citing sources appropriately in the text, in footnotes and/or a bibliography – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - g. Grammatical accuracy in written work – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - h. Using correct punctuation – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - i. Avoiding plagiarism – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - j. Writing quickly – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - k. Comments \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. How important is each skill to your success in your University coursework:
  - a. Planning and outlining drafts – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - b. Writing drafts – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - c. Revising drafts – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - d. Summarizing, paraphrasing, and synthesizing information from outside sources – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important, Sometimes, Always
  - e. Evaluating resources – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - f. Using quotations and citing sources appropriately in the text, in footnotes and/or a bibliography - Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - g. Grammatical accuracy in written work – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - h. Using correct punctuation – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important

- i. Avoiding plagiarism – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - j. Writing quickly – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - k. Comments \_\_\_\_\_
6. How prepared were you for these kinds of academic writing skills before you came to this University?
- a. Planning and outlining drafts – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - b. Writing drafts – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - c. Revising drafts – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - d. Summarizing, paraphrasing, and synthesizing information from outside sources – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - e. Evaluating resources – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - f. Using quotations and citing sources appropriately in the text, in footnotes and/or a bibliography - Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - g. Grammatical accuracy in written work – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - h. Using correct punctuation – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - i. Avoiding plagiarism – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - j. Writing quickly – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - k. Comments \_\_\_\_\_
7. How frequently were these skills addressed in your English language course in your home country?

#### **E. ACADEMIC LISTENING**

1. Are you tested on information provided in lectures and/or from other audio-visual materials like DVDs?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
2. Please use the following scale to indicate to what degree you use each of the following skills in your university courses:



- a. Understanding and following oral instructions – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - b. Taking notes effectively during teacher-centered lectures – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - c. Take notes effectively while watching supplemental, audio or audio-visual materials – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - d. Distinguishing between main and secondary ideas during lecture – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - e. Distinguishing between ideas and examples during lecture - – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - f. Understanding technical vocabulary or jargon – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - g. Ability to see relationships between ideas or different segments of the lecture(s) – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - h. Ability to synthesize information from lecture with other sources of information such as textbooks – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - i. Ability to understand other students' questions or comments during class – Rarely, Sometimes, Always
  - j. Comments \_\_\_\_\_
3. Please use the following scale to indicate to what degree you feel you were prepared for these skills before you came to University:
- a. Understanding and following oral instructions – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - b. Taking notes effectively during teacher-centered lectures – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - c. Take notes effectively while watching supplemental, audio or audio-visual materials – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - d. Distinguishing between main and secondary ideas during lecture – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - e. Distinguishing between ideas and examples during lecture - Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - f. Understanding technical vocabulary or jargon – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - g. Ability to see relationships between ideas or different segments of the lecture(s) – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared

- h. Ability to synthesize information from lecture with other sources of information such as textbooks – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - i. Ability to understand other students' questions or comments during class – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
4. For each skill, please rate how important it is for your success at University:
- a. Understanding and following oral instructions – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - b. Taking notes effectively during teacher-centered lectures – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - c. Take notes effectively while watching supplemental, audio or audio-visual materials – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - d. Distinguishing between main and secondary ideas during lecture – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - e. Distinguishing between ideas and examples during lecture - Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - f. Understanding technical vocabulary or jargon – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - g. Ability to see relationships between ideas or different segments of the lecture(s) – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - h. Ability to synthesize information from lecture with other sources of information such as textbooks – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - i. Ability to understand other students' questions or comments during class – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
5. How frequently were these skills addressed in your English language course in your home country?

## **F. ACADEMIC SPEAKING**

1. What percentage of each class spend on student discussion or student-led activities (such as presentations)?

- a. 1-25%
  - b. 26-50%
  - c. 51-75%
  - d. 76-100%
2. Please use the following scale to indicate to what degree you include each of the following skills in your English language university courses:
- a. Ability to ask for help, clarification, or information – Rarely, sometimes, always
  - b. Ability to explain or justify answers - Rarely, sometimes, always
  - c. Ability to define or describe concepts - Rarely, sometimes, always
  - d. Giving peer feedback - Rarely, sometimes, always
  - e. Participating in a group discussion by stating points of view, agreeing, disagreeing, giving reasons and/interrupting - Rarely, sometimes, always
  - f. Giving an oral presentation - Rarely, sometimes, always
  - g. Summarizing or paraphrasing materials - Rarely, sometimes, always
  - h. Describing processes - Rarely, sometimes, always
  - i. Verbalizing numerical data - Rarely, sometimes, always
  - j. Conducting interviews - Rarely, sometimes, always
  - k. Comments \_\_\_\_\_
3. Please use the following scale to indicate how important each of the following skills in your English language university courses:
- a. Ability to ask for help, clarification, or information – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important  
Ability to explain or justify answers - Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - b. Ability to define or describe concepts - Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important  
Giving peer feedback - Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - c. Participating in a group discussion by stating points of view, agreeing, disagreeing, giving reasons and/interrupting - Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - d. Giving an oral presentation - Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - e. Summarizing or paraphrasing materials - Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - f. Describing processes - Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - g. Verbalizing numerical data - Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important

- h. Conducting interviews - Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - i. Comments \_\_\_\_\_
4. How prepared were you for these kinds of skills before you came to this university?
- a. Ability to ask for help, clarification, or information – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - b. Ability to explain or justify answers - Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - c. Ability to define or describe concepts - Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - d. Giving peer feedback - Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - e. Participating in a group discussion by stating points of view, agreeing, disagreeing, giving reasons and/interrupting – Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - f. Giving an oral presentation - Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - g. Summarizing or paraphrasing materials - Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - h. Describing processes - Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - i. Verbalizing numerical data - Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - j. Conducting interviews - Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - k. Comments \_\_\_\_\_
5. How frequently were these types of skills used in your English language courses in your home country?

## **G. TECHNOLOGICAL LITEACY**

1. Please use the following scale to indicate to what degree you use each of the following skills in your English language university courses:
- a. Typing on a computer – Rarely, sometime, always
  - b. Conducting research on the internet – Rarely, sometime, always
  - c. Searching an online library catalog or database – Rarely, sometime, always
  - d. Submitting homework online or as an attachment – Rarely, sometime, always
  - e. Communicating via email – Rarely, sometime, always
  - f. Using online course programs such as Blackboard, Moodle, or WebCT – Rarely, sometime, always

- g. Comments \_\_\_\_\_
2. How frequently were these types of skills used in your English language courses in your home country?
  3. Please list any other technology skills that you believe incoming international students need to be successful in a university environment.

## **H. ASSESSMENT PRACTICES**

1. Please click all forms of assessment that you have experienced in your English language university courses:
  - a. Objective tests like multiple choice, true-false, fill-in-the-blank, etc.
  - b. Short-answer tests
  - c. In-class essay exams
  - d. Essays or reports
  - e. Problem-solving sets
  - f. Presentations
  - g. Group projects
  - h. Paper-based portfolios
  - i. Electronic portfolios
  - j. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
2. How frequently were these types of assessment practices used in your English language courses in your home country?
3. How prepared were you for these kinds of assessment practices before you came to this university?
  - a. Objective tests like multiple choice, true-false, fill-in-the-blank, etc. - Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - b. Short-answer tests - Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - c. In-class essay exams - Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - d. Essays or reports - Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - e. Problem-solving sets - Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - f. Presentations - Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
  - g. Group projects - Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared

- h. Paper-based portfolios - Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared
- i. Electronic portfolios - Not applicable to my field, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared, extremely prepared

# **I. POST-SECONDARY ACADEMIC CULTURE**

4. Please indicate to what degree you believe you were prepared before you left your home country to handle the following:
  - a. Academic expectations and workload – unprepared, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared
  - b. College placement tests (such as TOEFL) - unprepared, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared
  - c. Time management and study skills - unprepared, not very prepared, somewhat prepared, prepared, very prepared
5. Please indicate to what degree you believe you were aware of the following before you left your home country:
  - a. Academic honesty – unaware, not very aware, somewhat aware, aware, very aware
  - b. College admission and financial aid in the United States of America- unaware, not very aware, somewhat aware, aware, very aware
  - c. College student services - unaware, not very aware, somewhat aware, aware, very aware
  - d. Student teacher roles in the United States of America - unaware, not very aware, somewhat aware, aware, very aware
6. For each skill, please use the following scale to indicate how important it is to your success at university:
  - a. Academic honesty – Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
  - b. College admission and financial aid in the United States of America- Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important e
  - c. College student services - Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important Student teacher roles in the United States of America - Not applicable to my field, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important, extremely important
7. Please list any other skills that you believe incoming international students need to be successful in a university environment

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Interview Questions**

**STUDENT 1: “ROSALINE”****1. CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION EXPERIENCE:**

- a. You stated that you were very well prepared for the various kinds of faculty instruction and instructional methods before you came to this university but that these types of instructional methods were used less frequently in your home country. How did you become more confident with these methods and what are the common types of instructional methods used in your home country? If you did feel prepared, but the methodology was very different in your home country (no group work, no student-led activities), what is it that prepared you for that?

**2. ACADEMIC READING:**

- a. You stated that you read 51 pages or more weekly for your class assignments and that you felt that you were very prepared for a variety of academic reading skills. Could you go into more depth about how the reading proficiency teaching methods in your home country helped you gain these proficiency and confidence in these skills at university?
- b. Would you describe how you were more formally evaluated on your academic reading skills in your home country? How was this different than in your US university coursework?

**3. ACADEMIC WRITING:**

- a. Overall, you stated that you were very prepared/prepared for all the academic writing skills before you came to this university. If you did feel prepared, but the methodology was very different in your home country, such as using these skills at the end of your course of studies, what is it that prepared you for that at the beginning of your coursework?

**4. ACADEMIC LISTENING:**

- a. It seems that you were pretty prepared for academic listening skills before coming to university and you stated that all listening skills were very important. Why do you think listening skills are so very important for the success of ESL international students?

**5. ACADEMIC SPEAKING:**

- a. You stated that you felt that you were extremely prepared for a variety of academic speaking skills. Were these speaking proficiency teaching methods similar to the kinds of collaborative speaking activities you experience in your US American college classes?



- b. Why are academic speaking skills so important to the success of ESL international students?

#### **6. TECHNOLOGICAL LITERACY:**

- a. You stated that online research is a skill that incoming international students need to be successful in a university environment. Could you expand on your rationale for that? Also, what if any preparation did you have for that coming into university?

#### **7. POST-SECONDARY ACADEMIC CULTURE:**

- a. You also stated that you were not very aware of “college admission and financial aid in the USA”, and “student teacher roles in the USA.”
  - i. Why is college student services very important to your success at university?
  - ii. Why are student teacher roles in the US important to your success at university? Describe any key differences in these areas between the US and your country.
- b. You stated that the incoming international students need to be aware of the homework and assignment load in a US university environment in order to be successful. How can this university do a better job making these expectations more transparent to incoming international students?
- c. You also stated that instructions from faculty can be a bit overwhelming. What are some recommendations that you have for faculty to make this more accessible for incoming international students?

#### **8. ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS:**

- a. What is the one thing you wish you’d known and didn’t?
- b. What advice would you give someone coming to university in the States?

### **STUDENT 2: “LARISSA”**

#### **1. CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION EXPERIENCE:**

- a. You stated that internships/service learning were extremely important for your success at university. Why would you say this is extremely important for your success at university? Is this methodology very different than in your home country? What are your thoughts about the lack of internships/service learning in your home country experience? Do you think it would have helped you at university?
- b. You stated that you were not very prepared for the various instructional methods before coming to the United States. Could you describe in more detail which instructional methods in particular were challenging and how. How do you think you

could have been better prepared – Admissions conversations, orientation, etc..?

## **2. ACADEMIC READING:**

- a. You stated that you were somewhat prepared for reading efficiently and not very prepared to use and combine information from multiple sources before you came to this university. You also said that these two skills were important skills to have in order to be successful at university. How comfortable do you feel with these skills now? Could you describe how you gained proficiency and confidence in these skills at university?

## **3. ACADEMIC WRITING:**

- a. You state that "grammatical accuracy in written work", "planning and outlining drafts", and "writing drafts" were usually addressed in your English courses before coming to university in the United States.  
However, "summarizing, paraphrasing, and synthesizing information from outside sources", "using quotations and citing sources appropriately in the text, in footnotes and/or a bibliography", and "avoiding plagiarism" were not addressed in your English courses.
- b. How did you become more confident in these writing skills while at university in the US? Were your other classmates learning these skills at the same time as well? Were you able to find support from university staff and faculty to improve these skills?

## **4. ACADEMIC LISTENING:**

- a. It seems that you were pretty prepared for academic listening skills before coming to university and you stated that all listening skills were very important. Why do you think listening skills are so very important for the success of ESL international students? What, if any, challenges do you still face?
- b. You stated that you did not use supplemental, audio or audio-visual materials in your English classes in your home country. Could you describe what your difficulties were in adjusting to using these materials in your university coursework?

## **5. ACADEMIC SPEAKING:**

- a. You stated that you were not very prepared for "giving peer feedback" and "participating in group discussion by stating points of view, agreeing, disagreeing, giving reasons/and interrupting" but that these skills very important in your English language university course. What kinds of collaborative speaking activities are you required to take part in your classes here that differ from what you prepared for in English classes in your country?

## **6. ASSESSMENT PRACTICES:**

***Q38: Please click all forms of assessment that you have experienced in your English language university courses:***

*In-class essay exams, Essays or reports,  
Presentations, Group projects,  
Paper-based portfolios, Electronic portfolios*

***Q39: How frequently were these types of assessment practices used in your English language courses in your home country?***

*The selected options are used about 80% in my English language courses.*

- a.** Please explain what you mean by “80% in my English language courses”? Which of these forms of assessment were more common in your country and which are most challenging for you now and why?

## **7. POST-SECONDARY ACADEMIC CULTURE:**

- a.** You stated that you were not very prepared for the academic expectation and workload before you left your home country. Please provide a few examples of any surprises. How did you discover these expectations and how are you overcoming challenges?
- b.** You also stated that you were not very aware of “academic honesty,” “college admission and financial aid in the USA”, and “student teacher roles in the USA.”
  - a.** Why is academic honesty extremely important to your success at university?
  - b.** Why is college student services very important to your success at university?
  - c.** Why are student teacher roles in the US important to your success at university?
  - d.** Describe any key differences in these areas between the US and your country.

## **8. ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS:**

- a.** What is the one thing you wish you’d known and didn’t?
- b.** What advice would you give someone coming to university in the States?

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Human Consent Form - Capstone Participation Request**

Dear student,

I am a graduate student working on a Master's degree in teaching English as a Second Language at Hamline University. As part of my Master's degree program, I will be conducting research about ESL international students' educational experiences at Hamline University. I will be interviewing current degree seeking/visiting ESL international students to determine what their academic experiences have been like.

The purpose of this letter is to ask you to participate in my research. For this study, I will send out a questionnaire asking questions about your academic experiences at your university in your home country as well as your academic experience in an American university classroom. The questionnaire can be conducted in the privacy of your dorm or and at a time that is convenient for you. The questionnaire will take a total of 30 minutes to one hour. After the questionnaires are complete and a preliminary analysis has been completed, I may send a copy via email of what I have written and ask that you review it for accuracy. I may also follow up with you for a follow-up interview. The interviews will be audio recorded and will be conducted in a private study room at a local location that is convenient for you. Each interview will be approximately an hour in length and refreshments will be provided.

The results of this study will be very valuable since there are very few studies that ask ESL international students about their academic experiences in an American university setting. The results of this study will be beneficial for educators who work with ESL international students in a higher education setting.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be able to receive a summary of the research results, if you would like. There is little to no risk to you for participating in this study.

Your identity will remain anonymous through use of a pseudonym if you wish. For further protection of your identity, questionnaire and interview recordings will be destroyed one year after the completion of this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any point in time.

This study has been approved by the Hamline University Institutional Review Board. Once completed, this research will be public scholarship and the abstract (summary of what the research is about) and final written product will be cataloged in Hamline's Bush Library Digital Commons (meaning the final product can be checked out from Hamline's Bush Library). Further, results of the study may be included in an article in a professional journal or used as part of professional development. As stated above, your identity will remain anonymous in all cases. If you agree to participate in this study, keep this page and then sign and date the agreement to participate form and return it to me. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,  
Jackie Combs  
Phone: 651-236-7925  
Email: jcombs01@hamline.edu

**Informed Consent Signature:**

I have received and read a letter of informed consent about this study for which you will be participating in a questionnaire/interview with ESL international students about their academic and cultural experiences at Hamline University. I understand that my participation will involve completing a questionnaire for approximately 30 minutes to one hour in a private location. I understand that my participation will involve being potentially interviewed for approximately 30 minutes to one hour in a private location. I understand that my identity will

remain anonymous throughout the study. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may-withdraw at any point in time. Please sign your name electronically below if you agree to participate in my research:

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